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THE STAR - CHILD
AND OTHER PLAYS





THE PRINCESS MOST CONTRARY

THE STAR-CHILD AND OTHER PLAYS

By
RITA BENTON

Author of "Noah's Flood" "The Golden Calf," and
other Bible Plays

*Illustrated by Photographs of Actual
Performances by Children*

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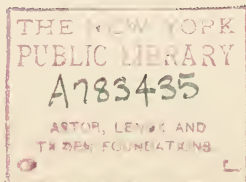
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from type in the United States
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ROY W. BENTON
D. BENTON
Y. BENTON



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B

To the Mother
*who is always an inspiration,
and seldom a critic*

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*Grateful acknowledgment is made to the
courtesy of Edward H. Waters for
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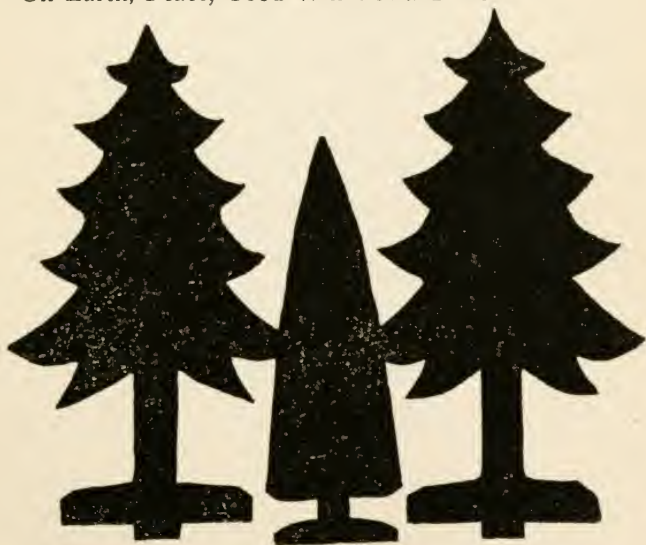
PREFACE

THESE little plays have all been acted by children, mainly for the joy of pageantry, but, in part, to assist in the building of a children's settlement, a House of Happiness, where also they have been performed.

The acting time of each play is about forty-five minutes. Eight rehearsals to a play is the average.

The simpler the setting, in general, the better! Indoor scenes a plain brown burlap has been found the best for a peasant setting; for kingly scenes have a handsome curtain at the back, a dais and a throne. For out-of-door scenes hang a deep blue curtain; against this, if desired, place real palm, box or bay trees, or have the conventional shapes cut out of wood and painted a Noah's ark green.

Although only the first play (Where Love Is, There God Is Also) mentions "Christmas," and three of the others are Easter plays (The Life Beyond, A Spark Neglected Burns the House, and King Robert of Sicily), nevertheless, each play strives to carry the message of "On Earth, Peace, Good Will Toward Men."



CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE STAR-CHILD	9
From the story by Oscar Wilde.	
WHERE LOVE IS, THERE GOD IS ALSO	35
From the story by Tolstoy.	
THE HAPPY MAN, (An Old Greek Legend)	57
Suggested by the John Hay poem.	
A SPARK NEGLECTED BURNS THE HOUSE	63
From the story by Tolstoy.	
KING ROBERT OF SICILY	79
From the poem by Longfellow.	
YUSSOUF	99
From the poem by James Russell Lowell.	
THE LIFE BEYOND	107
From the story by Mrs. Alfred Gatty.	
THE RING OF MAGIC POWER	119
From a legend by Lessing.	

THE STAR-CHILD

FROM THE STORY

BY

OSCAR WILDE



THE PEOPLE

A BEAR.
A BIRD.
A FROG.
A HARE.
A MOLE.
A TORTOISE.
SEVERAL RABBITS.

FIRST PEASANT.
SECOND PEASANT.
WIFE OF SECOND PEASANT.
JAN } Children of Second
LISE } Peasant.
THE STAR-CHILD, a Baby.
THE STAR-CHILD, a Boy.
HILDA }
PETER } Playmates.
BARBARA }
THE BEGGAR WOMAN.
THE LEPER.
THE WICKED OLD MA-
GICIAN.
FIRST SENTRY.
SECOND SENTRY.
A CAPTAIN.
THE LEPER'S CHILD.
THE PRIEST.

THE PLACE

ACT I, ACT II, ACT III, SCENE I, are all in the forest or the edge of the forest.

ACT III, SCENE II, is just outside the walls of a city.

If this play is given out of doors, a wire may be stretched across the back; from this may be hung a gray curtain cut at the top so as to represent the machicolated walls of a medieval town. These curtains may be drawn across the back for the last scene.

THE STAR-CHILD

The animals enter in single file; they seek food. The RABBITS munch carrots; the BIRD finds a worm.

THE BEAR. Ugh! This is perfectly monstrous weather. Why doesn't the government look to it?

THE BIRD. It will be a hard winter, I'm thinking. The worms are so very scarce.

The BEAR dangles a bit of meat above the head of the TORTOISE.

THE TORTOISE (*struggling to reach food*). And food so high!

THE HARE. The squirrels are to blame. They're hoarding nuts.

THE BEAR. Nonsense! Nonsense! I tell you it's all the fault of the government; and if you don't believe me I shall eat you.

THE FROG. Hi, you rabbits, d'ye hear that? You're the government, ain't you? Leastways you're the majority. Now what are you all going to do about it?

THE RABBITS (*aghast*). What! Us do something! Us, rabbits! (*They raise paws and jump backwards.*)

THE BEAR (*raises paw for silence and sniffs; all sniff*). I smell man. Hurry.

The animals all follow silently into forest.

THE TORTOISE (*the last*). I do wish he wouldn't always say "HURRY."

Two PEASANTS enter carrying fagots.

FIRST PEASANT. Hurry, man, hurry, ere the moon wanes.

SECOND PEASANT. Chut, fool, we are out of the forest. Yonder shines home firelight.

FIRST PEASANT. Glory be to God! And in our natural shapes! Neither lizards, bats nor mice!

SECOND PEASANT. Tush, man, so fearful?

FIRST PEASANT. Ai! I fear the wicked magician who hath laid yonder town under spell of enchantment. He flies through the forest by night.

SECOND PEASANT. Folly! For its own sin is yonder town punished. Many a time and oft they have driven away the stranger from their gates. So have they lost their good king and queen and are under magician's spell. Serves them right, say I.

FIRST PEASANT. Ai, comrade, and what of the good king and queen? They did no evil, yet hath he cast over them his magic spell—hearken! (*Clutches other man.*)

SECOND PEASANT (*gathering sticks*). Give over thy fears. See how the earth looks like a flower of silver and the moon a flower of gold. Come, man, be merry.

FIRST PEASANT (*gloomily*). Why should such as we make merry, seeing life is for the rich and not for such as we.

SECOND PEASANT. True! Much is given to some and little to others. Naught is equally divided save sorrow.

FIRST PEASANT. Ai! Ai! See the star!

SECOND PEASANT. A shooting-star! Wish on it, comrade!

BOTH (*stretching out eager hands*). RICHES! RICHES!

FIRST PEASANT. It fell behind yon clump of bushes.

SECOND PEASANT. There is a crock of gold for him who finds it.

Both run. The first stumbles and falls; he nurses his ankle.

FIRST PEASANT (*shouts*). Hola! We will share equally thou thief, thou—

The SECOND PEASANT returns carrying a bundle of golden tissue curiously embroidered with stars.

FIRST PEASANT. Thou must divide. 'Twas I saw the star first.

SECOND PEASANT. Peace, man. Here is no gold nor silver neither. (*He unwraps bundle.*)

FIRST PEASANT (*disgusted*). A child!

SECOND PEASANT (*softly*). A star-child!

FIRST PEASANT. This is a bitter ending to our hopes; for what doth a child profit a man? Let us leave it here and go our way, seeing we are poor men and have children of our own, whose bread we may not give to another.

SECOND PEASANT. Nay, it were an evil thing to leave the child to perish here in the cold. I am poor as thou art and have but little in the pot, yet I will bring it home with me and my wife shall care for it.

FIRST PEASANT. Thou soft of heart! Thy wife will have a word to say. Ai! I would not bring my Margot such a gift; she would give me a clip on the ear, I promise thee. Thou art a very fool.

SECOND PEASANT. Maybe. Yet see, it is a child of the stars! If we let it die, perchance the stars would be angry.

FIRST PEASANT. My wife hath a tongue bites sharper than the stars. (*His voice becomes sly.*) Thou hast the child, good! Give me therefore the cloak, for it is meet that we should share.

SECOND PEASANT. Nay, for the cloak is neither thine nor mine, but the child's only.

FIRST PEASANT (*taking up his bundle of fagots*). Eh,

well, for the sake of the cloak thy wife may receive the child, but were I thee I would leave it for the stars to suckle. Godspeed. (*He goes.*)

SECOND PEASANT (*wraps child well; cries*). Hola, my wife! Ah, little star-child, soon thou shalt be warm.

His WIFE and children enter from cottage which may or may not be shown on stage.

WIFE. But thou art late! Such strange lights in the forest! But—what hast thou there?

PEASANT. I have found something in the forest and I have brought it to thee.

WIFE. What is it? Show it to me for the house is bare, and we have need of many things. Is it warm clothing for the little ones?

LISE (*a tiny girl, points*). It moveth! I think it is a little lamb.

JAN. Or a pig? (*Eagerly*) Hast found a pig, my father?

PEASANT (*unwraps child*). I found this in the forest. See!

CHILDREN (*cry*). O sweet babe!

WIFE. Alack, good man, have we not children enough of our own that thou must needs bring a changeling to sit at the hearth?

PEASANT. Nay, but I found it perishing with cold. A great star fell from heaven and where it fell we found this cloak of gold and the child therein. It is a star-child.

LISE (*pressing close to her mother*). A baby star! O mother, let it stay.

JAN. Let it play with us and it shall share my porridge.

BOTH CHILDREN (*raise pleading hands*). Prithee, dear mother.

PEASANT. We would offend the good God did we not give it shelter.

WIFE (*flouncing away*). Offend God forsooth! What care hath God for us? Our children lack bread and shall we feed the child of another? Who careth for us?

PEASANT. Nay, but God careth for the sparrows even, and feedeth them.

WIFE. Do not the sparrows die of hunger in the winter? Take thou thy star-child to the village priest and let God's servant guard it. (*She hastens out, or goes inside cottage and slams door.*)

The PEASANT sits on a rude bench. LISE and JAN sit beside him and stroke baby. Presently the WIFE calls.

WIFE. Lise! Jan! Come inside; it is perishing cold—and bring the fagots.

Reluctantly the children obey and go.

WIFE (*calls again*). Husband, come in; the night is bitter chill. (*As he does not answer she comes out again.*) Wilt thou sit here all night? The firelight is within and the table set, and all is warm and bright.

PEASANT. It is better here. In a house where the heart is hard cometh ever a bitter wind.

The WIFE hesitates; then she kneels beside him burying her face in his shoulder. Presently she rises and stretches out her arms for the child.

WIFE. Give me the child. It shall lie with my littlest babe and the twain shall bring a blessing.

PEASANT (*smiles and gives child into her arms*). Already hath it brought blessing, for thy heart hath received sweetness and light, and thy hearth shall be warm for aye. (*With his arm about her they go.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

TEN YEARS LATER

The bird enters pitifully, fluttering about with a broken wing. He utters two short notes again and again.

THE BIRD (*calls*). Brothers! Brothers! (*The other animals hasten in.*) O brothers, see, see, see! (*Shows broken wing.*)

ANIMALS (*crowd about and hold up sympathetic paws*). Oh! Oh! Oh!

THE FROG. You've got only yourself to blame. Now, if you would only jump—(*He illustrates*)—instead of flying—

THE TORTOISE (*shakes his finger*). Go slow, brother, go slow; safety first!

THE BIRD (*indignantly*). It was nothing of the sort; the Star-child, he clipped my wing.

ANIMALS. O dear! O dear! O dear!

THE BEAR. The little monster! The government should suppress him.

THE FROG. Hi, you rabbits, aren't you ever going to do something?

RABBITS (*backing out of group*). What! Us do something! Us, rabbits! (*Three short jumps from center.*)

THE HARE. Avoid! The Star-child comes.

All scramble away in great fear, saving the MOLE, who hides in corner. The STAR-CHILD enters dancing with his playmates. Music: Hippity, Hippity, Hop, by Mary Pamela Crary.

STAR-CHILD (*spies the MOLE*). Hi, comrades, the mole, see, see; give chase!

All chase the MOLE till he is caught within the circle. He tries to break away. They let him go and then catch him again, laughing.

MOLE (*holding up paws in prayer*). Little master, little master, let me go.

STAR-CHILD. Nay, thou shalt make sport for us.

MOLE (*weeping*). Alas, thy sport, it is death for me.

BARBARA. Dear Star-child, let him go.

HILDA. Perhaps—perhaps—he is the wicked magician in disguise. Beware, O Star-child.

PETER (*mocking*). He may look on thee with an evil eye and cause thee to lose thy beauty, *pret-ty* Star-child.

STAR-CHILD (*with a toss of the head*). I fear not—I! Look not upon me with an evil eye, or I will blind thee. (*To PETER*) Bring me a stick. (*PETER gives him one.*)

THE MOLE. Oh, oh, kind sir, have mercy. Oh, don't put my eyes out, little master. (*STAR-CHILD pokes at his eyes.*) O wicked little child! Ai! Ai! (*He runs about blindly.*)

HILDA. I think it's a shame and I shall tell on thee. (*She goes out.*)

STAR-CHILD. Tell away, then; who cares? Hi, hi, Mole, run away. (*Runs after MOLE beating him.*) Isn't he funny?

The MOLE escapes. Enter the PEASANT and HILDA.

PEASANT. Star-child, come hither. Didst thou put out the little animal's eyes?

STAR-CHILD (*proudly*). Shall I not do my pleasure? I am the *Star-child*.

PEASANT. Hast thou no pity? See, thou, the fly is thy brother; do it no harm. The wild birds that roam through the forest have their freedom; snare them not for thy pleasure. God made the blind worm and the mole and each his place. Who art thou to bring pain into God's world?

STAR-CHILD (*tilts up his face*). Sayest thou I am brother to the worm? Bah! Ye cannot understand me for ye are earth-born, while I, I am a child of the stars.

PEASANT (*grasps his arm*). Oh, base! Thou who breakest the robin's wing and stonest the leper, who blindest the little mole, hast thou no sorrow? Nay, then, thou shalt feel pain. Maybe that will breed pity in thy heart. (*He drags STAR-CHILD away.*)

The other children cluster with heads close.

PETER. Will he beat him?

HILDA. Never hath he beaten the Star-child.

PETER (*or another child*). Doth he fear to beat him, think you, lest he be some great king's son?

BARBARA. Nay, but he is so beautiful. My mother loves him better than all of us. She will not let my father touch him, no.

HILDA. Always he hath the best.

The STAR-CHILD returns carrying a ball. He is rubbing himself. The children laugh.

CHILDREN (*mocking*). Ho, Star-child, did he hurt thee?

STAR-CHILD. Ho, he did not hurt me as I shall hurt the next beast I see. (*Tosses ball.*) Come, come, a game.

ONE OF THE CHILDREN. Hast thou a new game, Star-child?

STAR-CHILD.

Yea, I made it up while he beat me. (*He jumps on bench.*) Get in a row before me.

I am king over you all;

She to whom I throw my ball,

She shall be queen. (*Throws ball to BARBARA.*)

Barbe, bow the knee;

Then come sit aside of me. (*BARBARA does so.*)

Next I choose my soldiers true,

Soldier one (*Throws ball*) and soldier two. (*Throws ball.*)—

Next to whom my ball I fling,

He is traitor to the king.

You catch him ere he catch me

Or he'll be king of all you see. (*He throws ball suddenly at PETER. The soldiers seek to catch PETER but he reaches STAR-CHILD first.*)

PETER. I've won! I've won! I shall be king. (*He jumps on bench.*)

STAR-CHILD (*arranging his doublet*). I am weary of the game. Let's play my royal parents come to claim me. Will they come for me at night in a fiery chariot when the sky is white with stars, or in the day when the other stars are sleeping?

BARBARA. I'll be Star-queen, thy mother. Truly I'll dazzle thee with my fine appearing.

STAR-CHILD (*spies BEGGAR in distance*). Ai, comrades, see that foul old beggar woman under that fair and green leaved tree. Come, let us drive her hence for she is ugly and ill-favored. I wager I hit her three times out of four.

The BEGGAR WOMAN approaches. The children throw sticks or leaves at her.

CHILDREN. Away, old hag, away!

The PEASANT and his WIFE hasten out. She seizes the STAR-CHILD. He cuffs others.

WIFE. O hard of heart! Dost thou know no mercy? What evil hath this poor woman done to thee that thou should'st treat her in this wise?

STAR-CHILD. Let me go. I am no son of thine to do thy bidding.

THE WIFE. Thou speakest truly. Yet did we show thee pity when we found thee in the forest.

THE BEGGAR WOMAN. The forest! Found in the forest! Ah-h! (*She falls fainting.*)

THE WIFE. Quick, Barbe, some water; the poor woman fainteth. There, there, dear heart. (*She kneels beside BEGGAR. BARBARA goes for water.*)

STAR-CHILD. Let us away! Let us find a bear in the

forest! I know a mighty trick to lead him a dance. (*The children run out. BARBARA brings water.*)

THE WIFE. Poor soul, drink a little water; 'twill comfort thee.

BEGGAR WOMAN (*reviving*). Nay, I want nothing. Where—where is *he*? Didst thou not say the child—the beautiful boy I saw but now, that he was found in the forest?

PEASANT. Even so.

BEGGAR WOMAN. Was it ten years from this day?

PEASANT. Yea, it was in the forest that we found him, and it was ten years from this day.

BEGGAR WOMAN. And what signs did'st thou find upon him? Bare he not upon his neck a chain of amber? Was not around him a cloak of gold tissue curiously embroidered with stars?

PEASANT. Even as thou sayest. I will go show them to thee. (*He goes.*)

BEGGAR WOMAN. The Lord hath showed the way.

The PEASANT returns with robe and chain. The woman grasps them.

PEASANT. In these I found him; the night was bitter chill.

BEGGAR WOMAN. My God, I thank thee! O sir, he is my little son whom I lost in the forest. I pray thee send for him quickly, for in search of him I have wandered over the whole world.

Shouts outside. Enter the STAR-CHILD riding a bear. The others follow.

STAR-CHILD. See *me!* See *me!*

PETER. He caught a cub in the forest; he slew the mother.

STAR-CHILD (*riding about*). Aye, with my bow and arrow. See *me!* See *me!*

PEASANT. Star-child, thy mother is come.

STAR-CHILD. A merry jest! What, really and truly? (*He slips off the BEAR'S back.*) Barbara, fetch my cap with the eagle's feather. I would greet my mother royally for truly she must be a very great queen. Out of the way, beggar woman! (*He seeks to brush past her.*)

BEGGAR WOMAN. Child, I am thy mother.

STAR-CHILD. Thou art mad to say so. I am no son of thine for thou art ugly and in rags.

BEGGAR WOMAN (*on her knees*). Nay, thou art indeed my little son whom I bare in the forest. (*Holds out arms.*) The robbers stole thee from me and left thee to die, but I recognized thee when I saw thee; and the signs also have I recognized, the cloak of golden tissue and the amber chain.

STAR-CHILD. O—O—tell me it is a lie. It is a lie!

BEGGAR WOMAN. It is the truth. Therefore I pray thee come with me, for over the whole world have I wandered in search of thee. I have great need of thy love.

STAR-CHILD (*walks away and talks over his shoulder*). If in very truth thou art my mother, it had been better hadst thou stayed away and not come here to shame me, seeing I thought I was the child of some star. (*Violently*) Therefore get thee hence, and let me see thy face no more!

THE CHILDREN (*point the finger of scorn*). Shame! Shame!

BEGGAR WOMAN. Alas, my son, wilt thou not kiss me before I go, for I have suffered much to find thee.

STAR-CHILD. Nay, I will not. I had rather kiss the toad or adder than kiss thee. Go! Go! (*He raises his switch. She shrinks away. He drives her out.*)

WIFE (*horrified*). See what he doth. (*She and the PEASANT rush after him.*)

The children cluster with heads together and frightened looks. The WIFE reappears dragging the STAR-CHILD. While the STAR-CHILD is out his face is smudged and lined, unless two children divide the part.

WIFE. Ah, child, child, would we had left thee to die in the forest yonder, thou cruel and unkind—

STAR-CHILD (*struggling*). Let me go! Let me go! What right hast thou to touch me, who am the star-child? (*He breaks away.*)

WIFE. Ah, God, God, lead him to see his sin. (*She goes sadly into cottage.*)

PETER (*derisively*). No star-child thou, but beggar woman's brat!

STAR-CHILD (*rushes at PETER*). I will fight thee for that word.

PETER (*in the act of doubling his fists, recoils*). Ai, what hath come to him? See! See!

HILDA. Thou art become as foul as the toad and as loathsome as the adder.

HILDA AND PETER. Go seek thy mother, beggar woman's brat.

STAR-CHILD (*dazed*). What do ye mean?

HILDA and PETER (*retreating and throwing sticks*). Star-child, beggar's brat, away! (*They back off stage.*)

STAR-CHILD (*frowning*). What is this they say? I will go look into the well of water and it shall tell me of my beauty. (*He runs to well, on or off stage, and runs back. Cries:*) Ai! Ai! It is not me, not me! (*Buries his face in his hands.*)

BARBARA (*puts her arms about him*). Dear Star-child, what doth it matter if thou hast lost thy comeliness? I will not mock at thee.

STAR-CHILD (*sobs*). Alas, I have denied my mother and driven her away. Surely this has come upon me by reason of my sin. But I thought—boo-hoo—I was a

star-child, and anyone would hate—boo-hoo—to be a *beggar's* child.

BARBARA. But thou art sorry? Thou wilt welcome her when she comes again?

STAR-CHILD. Nay, I will go and seek her through the world, nor will I rest till she give me her forgiveness.

BARBARA (*clutches him*). Thou shalt not leave us.

STAR-CHILD. Let me go, thou fool. (*He hits her; she weeps.*) Dear one, forgive. (*He looks himself over anxiously.*) Am I any uglier because I hit thee?

BARBARA. Thou art not ugly to me. Stay, thou, I prithee. (*He shakes his head.*) How wilt thou live—thou—a babe in the dark forest?

STAR-CHILD. Why, I will be a beggar like my mother. Farewell. (*He runs off after BEGGAR.*)

BARBARA *goes off weeping.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III

THREE YEARS LATER.

SCENE I—The Forest.

The animals enter dancing. Of a sudden the BEAR stops and lifts his paw.

BEAR (*sniffs*). I smell man. Hasten.

TORTOISE (*peevishly*). You always say "Hurry," Bear. There's naught to fear, so it be not the Star-child.

BIRD (*peering into distance*). No star-child he! It is a lad, ill-clad and foul of face.

The STAR-CHILD runs into circle.

STAR-CHILD. Good morrow, sirs. O tell me, have you seen my mother? She is a beggar woman.

THE HARE (*mockingly*). Beggar women have we seen, but none so beauteous as to have so fair a child.

THE FROG (*cruelly*). Beggar women have we seen, but none so ill-favored as to have a child like thee.

THE BEAR (*kindly*). What is thy name, little one, and why dost thou seek thy mother?

STAR-CHILD. I was called the Star-child. (*The animals all back away in horror.*) Do not fear me, comrades. I drove my mother from me and now must seek her. O bird, thou canst fly over the tops of the tall trees; canst thou see my mother?

THE BIRD. O Star-child, thou hast clipped my wing for thy pleasure; how can I fly?

STAR-CHILD. O little Mole, thou goest beneath the earth; tell me, is my mother there?

THE MOLE. O Star-child, you have blinded my eyes; how should I see?

STAR-CHILD. O Bear, you tell me, where is my mother?

THE BEAR (*gravely*). O Star-child, thou hast slain my mother; dost thou seek to slay thine also?

STAR-CHILD. O Rabbits, I have never injured you; will ye not aid me?

RABBITS (*jumping away*). What! Us do something! Us! Rabbits!

STAR-CHILD. Will no one aid me? For three years have I sought her, but the boys drove me from out the villages and mocked me. The world is cruel.

THE BEAR. Ai, little brother, thy world is what thou hast made it.

A pause, then the STAR-CHILD looks around at animals and holds out his hands.

STAR-CHILD. Forgive me, brothers.

ANIMALS (*approvingly*). Ai!

THE BEAR. Hark ye, brother, go to the great town yonder. It may be there thou wilt find news of her; for thither go many people in these days. Men say they await the coming of a young king, son of their former queen, who shall destroy the wicked magician who reigns there, and shall bring in a gentle rule.

STAR-CHILD (*hopefully*). Shall I find my mother there?

THE BEAR. I know not, comrade; come, we will show the way.

They go off with the STAR-CHILD riding on the BEAR's back.

SCENE II—Outside the Walls of the City.

The wicked old MAGICIAN enters through gate and beckons to sentries.

MAGICIAN. Come hither, my men, come hither. (*Sentries enter.*) Guard ye this gate and see that no stranger enter, else ye shall hang.

FIRST SENTRY. We obey, my lord.

The MAGICIAN goes out toward forest. The sentries march up and down.

SECOND SENTRY (*with a jerk of his thumb magician-wards*). What makes the old fellow so fearful?

FIRST SENTRY. Surely thou knowest the saying that in this very year, yea, in this very month, one shall enter here who shall be our young king, and will destroy that wicked old monster who rules us.

SECOND SENTRY. For certain I know that legend—that idle tale! Thou art not such a fool as to believe—

FIRST SENTRY. Ai! Here cometh food for jest. Ho, beggar boy, away! (*Flourishes pike.*)

The STAR-CHILD runs in.

STAR-CHILD. O sir, I seek my mother; she is a beggar.

FIRST SENTRY. Thy mother? Yai! Of a truth thy mother will not be merry when she sees thee, for thou art more ill-favored than the toad in the marsh. (*The child runs past him.*)

SECOND SENTRY (*blocks way*). Back, child, back! None entereth here save by order of the lord of the city. See, he passeth yonder!

The child runs back into forest. The CAPTAIN enters from city.

CAPTAIN. How now, my men; what means this?

FIRST SENTRY. Sir, but a beggar lad whom we have driven away.

CAPTAIN. Driven away, thou fool! Nay, but we will sell the foul thing for a slave, and his price shall be a bowl of sweet wine. (*The sentries grin.*)

Enter the MAGICIAN striking at child.

MAGICIAN. Be off! Be off! Importune me not!

CAPTAIN (*hastens forward and salutes*). O my lord, I pray you, pardon; he is my slave boy. Wouldest thou run away, thou little varlet? (*He cuffs child.*)

STAR-CHILD. Thou liest; I am not thy slave.

MAGICIAN. Hold, hold, I can use him; yea, I can use him. Thou carest not what becomes of him? Good! Good! I will give for him a cup of wine and sweet cheese cakes. (*Gives coin.*) Get ye within and drink your fill; yet keep your watch o' the gates.

SECOND SENTRY. Grammercy, lord. Lo, not a flea shall enter. (*The sentries go within.*)

CAPTAIN (*grips child*). Remember, sirrah, he is thy lord and master; if thou disobey, ere the night come thou wilt be a small green snake. (*He goes.*)

FIRST SENTRY (*calls back*). Or a bat in a belfry! Adieu, my lord!

MAGICIAN (*sits and eyes child evilly*). Come hither. (*The child comes with dragging step; the MAGICIAN grabs him.*) I have bought thee for a price; thou art mine. All men hate thee for thou art poor and foul of face. Now hearken to me: In a wood yonder there are three pieces of gold; one is of white gold and another is of yellow gold, and the third one is red. Go thou quickly and bring to me the piece of white gold, else I will beat thee with a hundred stripes, for thou art my slave, and I have bought thee for a bowl of sweet wine. Go now! (*Gives child a push and hobbles into town.*)

STAR-CHILD *looks woefully about him*. The HARE enters, limping and crying out.

THE HARE. O help me, someone! A big wicked man has caught me in a trap! (*Sees child.*) O good, kind little boy, help me I pray!

STAR-CHILD. I myself am but a slave; yet may I give thee thy freedom. (*Releases HARE.*)

THE HARE (*shakes his paw in air.*) Thou hast given me freedom; now what shall I give thee?

STAR-CHILD. Alas, I seek a piece of white gold in the forest; if I bring it not to my master he will beat me.

THE HARE. Come thou with me and I will lead thee to it. (*They go joyfully into forest.*)

The sentries appear, pushing a LEPER from out the gates of the city.

FIRST SENTRY (*kicking him*). Thou foul Leper, get thee hence! Knowest thou not the lord of the city hath commanded that all lepers be whipped from the city gates?

THE LEPER (*with dignity*). The lord of the city is the young king, and he is not yet come.

SECOND SENTRY (*levels pike*). Treason!

FIRST SENTRY. Come, come, do not excite thee, comrade; come to the flesh-pots. (*They go.*)

The STAR-CHILD runs in followed by the HARE. The child holds white coin.

STAR-CHILD. O I thank thee and thank thee! The kindness I did to thee thou hast returned an hundred-fold.

THE HARE. Nay, but as thou dealt with me, so have I dealt with thee. (*He runs back.*)

THE LEPER (*strikes bowl and rings bell*). Give me thy piece of money, O little child, or I must die of hunger.

STAR-CHILD (*clutches gold*). Alas, I have but this piece only, and if I give it not to my master he will beat me.

THE LEPER. Thou art cruel. (*He turns away.*)

STAR-CHILD (*draws a long breath*). Nay, but I have resolved to be cruel no longer; take thou the gold.

THE LEPER (*takes the coin*). Bless thee, my child! (*He goes into forest.*)

The STAR-CHILD stands shivering with hunched shoulders as he hears the MAGICIAN'S stick. The MAGICIAN enters carrying food on a tray.

MAGICIAN. Ai! Quick, boy, the gold!

STAR-CHILD. I have it not.

MAGICIAN (*beats him*). Take that! And that! And that! Here is thy breakfast. (*He throws food away.*) Now search me out that piece of yellow gold. If thou dost fail, I will give thee three hundred stripes, and if thou seekest to run away my soldiers shall go after thee and put out thy eyes. Go! (*Kicks child and goes.*)

STAR-CHILD (*terrified*). I must find the gold; I must, I must, I must! (*Searches wildly.*)

The FROG jumps in.

THE FROG. Hi, boy, come hither; see thou my leg? It is smashed. Bind it for me. Gently, gently, thou rascal! Ha, that is well. Now why art thou trembling? And thou a boy?

STAR-CHILD. I fear not, I! Only my master has sent me for a piece of yellow gold, and if I find it not he will beat me.

THE FROG. Is that all? Now for thy resemblance to the toad, my brother, I will aid thee. Come thou with me to the great pool yonder, and thou shalt plunge thy hand beneath the water.

STAR-CHILD. Kind sir, I thank thee.

THE FROG. Thank me not; we are equal, for as thou hast dealt with me, so will I deal with thee. (*They go to pool, on or off stage.*)

Enter the LEPER with a crying child.

THE LEPER. Peace, little one, thou shalt have food and shelter. (*The STAR-CHILD runs back bearing gold.*) Give me thy gold, fair child, for I have found this little one in the forest; he crieth because of hunger.

STAR-CHILD. But my master is angry; if I give him not this gold he will have no pity.

THE LEPER. Fair child, if in thy childhood any have pitied thee, so do thou pity this little one.

STAR-CHILD. All my life good folk have pitied me; take thou the gold. (*Gives coin.*)

THE LEPER. Bless thee, fair child. (*He goes with child into forest.*)

The MAGICIAN pounces out of gate.

MAGICIAN. A murrain on thee! Hast thou the gold?

STAR-CHILD. I have it not.

MAGICIAN (*claps his hands*). Ho, my soldiers, ho! (*The sentries run in.*) Take him and beat him well. (*The sentries drag him into town.*) Ai, what shall be done if he bring me not the gold? For only from a piece of red, red gold shall a key be forged which shall lock the gates of my city and prevent the young king from entering in. A murrain on him! My eyes are old—old. Only the eyes of a vile beggar boy are bright to get the

treasure. (*Calls.*) Ho, bring the brat out again. (*They bring in STAR-CHILD who sinks down.*)

FIRST SENTRY. My lord, he is nigh dead with fatigue; if thou use him now he will maybe die.

MAGICIAN. What matter so he do my will? Get ye within and bid all gates be closed that the young king find not entrance.

SECOND SENTRY. My lord, from what direction will the young king come?

MAGICIAN. Fool, I know not. Begone! (*The sentries go.*) Sirrah, come hither. Get me the red, red gold. If thou bring it to me this hour, I will free thee; if thou bring it not I will surely slay thee. (*His voice changes.*) Swiftly, boy; go-od boy, clever boy. (*Pats him and goes.*)

STAR-CHILD. Alas, my mother, shall I never find thee?

The BEAR patters in.

THE BEAR. Hi, little brother, dost thou remember me?

STAR-CHILD. Yea, I slew thy mother; now they will slay me and avenge thee.

THE BEAR. Why will they slay thee?

STAR-CHILD. If I bring not my master a piece of red, red gold.

THE BEAR. Cheer up, little brother; I will avenge me by showing thee the gold.

STAR-CHILD (*in wonder*). Wilt thou treat me so when I have so ill-treated thee?

THE BEAR. Nay, but as I would be dealt with, so will I deal with thee. (*They go.*)

Presently the STAR-CHILD runs back; he avoids the LEPER and child who enter immediately after him. The LEPER calls to him.

THE LEPER. O bountiful little one! (*The STAR-CHILD turns reluctantly.*) Thou hast fed the babe; 'tis her mother cries for succour; once again I pray you give.

STAR-CHILD. Sir, if I give this last piece of gold my master will slay me.

THE LEPER (*to little child*). Go, little one, and beg in thy mother's name.

THE CHILD (*holds out a tiny palm*). O kind boy, give me a penny for my mother.

STAR-CHILD (*hesitates then says desperately*). In my mother's name, take ye the gold. (*Gives child coin.*)

THE LEPER. Fear not, my son, for as thou hast dealt by others, so shall they deal with thee. Bless thee, my son! (*He and child depart into forest.*)

STAR-CHILD. Yea, but I do fear. (*He hears MAGICIAN'S stick and crouches low. He starts to flee; then he squares his shoulders.*) I will not fear! I will find my mother if so be she is in yonder city. (*He rushes to gate and meets MAGICIAN.*)

MAGICIAN. The ruddy gold, boy! Quick, the ruddy gold!

STAR-CHILD. I have it not.

MAGICIAN. Thou dardest to tell me so? (*Collars him.*) Thou shalt be strangled in my deepest dungeon; thine eyes shall be blinded and thy tongue—

STAR-CHILD. Help! Help!

The BEAR enters quietly behind the MAGICIAN.

MAGICIAN (*shaking child*). Thy tongue shall be torn from out thee.

VOICE of FROG from forest. Make way, make way! Way, for the young king cometh!

MAGICIAN (*drops child and blinks*). Eh? Where? Where?

THE BEAR (*raises a mighty paw and knocks him down*). Down on your knees before him! (*The MAGICIAN falls atop the STAR-CHILD. The BEAR puts one foot on MAGICIAN and growls; RABBITS and BIRD hop in; they form a circle about MAGICIAN.*)

THE BEAR.

Magician, thy time has come.

Hear, Magician, hear and tremble:

Be the beast thou dost resemble.

Loathsome adder, toad or snake,

Do thou its resemblance take.

Charm and spell thou shalt not break!

The animals draw a magic circle about him.

ANIMALS.

Be the beast thou dost resemble!

Hear, Magician, hear and tremble!

The MAGICIAN turns into a loathsome toad by shedding his outer garments. He hops off into forest. The STAR-CHILD rises and shakes himself. The HARE enters carrying a kingly robe; the FROG enters bearing a crown.

THE BEAR. Wherever is the tortoise? (*The TORTOISE crawls in bearing a sceptre.*) O Tortoise, do try to hurry!

THE TORTOISE. You always say "Hurry," Bear! I'm coming as fast as I can. (*Presents sceptre to STAR-CHILD.*)

This sceptre is made of white, white gold,

Fit for a lad that's fair.

THE FROG (*presents crown*).

Of yellow gold is the coronet,

To crown his yellow hair!

THE HARE (*presents robe*).

But the robe is woven of ruddy gold,

For a young king to wear.

ANIMALS (*all shout*). The young king! The young king!

Faces appear on battlements; the animals trot into forest.

FIRST SENTRY (*from battlements*). The young king! Halloo! I see the young king coming!

The SENTRIES and CAPTAIN, the PRIEST, HILDA and PETER, the PEASANT and his WIFE, and many other people pour out of gate shouting: The young king!

FIRST SENTRY. Welcome, O young king! How beautiful is our lord!

SECOND SENTRY. Surely so beautiful a king was never seen.

CAPTAIN (*kneels and presents key*). I yield thee the keys of the city.

STAR-CHILD. Ye mock me in my misery.

CAPTAIN. Nay, but thou art our lord whom we have sought so long, and the son of our king whom the wicked Magician laid under enchantment.

STAR-CHILD. I am no son of a king, but child of a poor beggar woman. And how sayest thou I am beautiful when I know I am evil to look at?

CAPTAIN (*holds up shield*). Look! How sayest my lord he is not beautiful?

The STAR-CHILD looks. He has gradually lost the lines and smudges and has regained his former beauty.

THE PRIEST. It was prophesied of old that in this year, yea, on this very day, there should come one who would rule over us. Therefore be thou our king.

STAR-CHILD. I am not worthy, for I have denied the mother who bare me, nor may I rest till I have her forgiveness. Therefore let me go.

FIRST SENTRY. Look, who cometh yonder?

SECOND SENTRY. It is the Leper who begged here by the roadside.

FIRST SENTRY. Also a beggar woman! Drive them hence. (*They level pikes and advance.*)

The BEGGAR WOMAN and LEPER enter.

STAR-CHILD (*rushes to them*). Forbear! (*They fall back; he kneels before BEGGAR WOMAN and LEPER.*) Mother, I denied thee in the hour of my pride; do thou receive thy child now? (*To LEPER*). O sir, thrice did I give thee of my mercy; bid my mother speak to me. (*Bows his head.*)

BEGGAR WOMAN (*places her hand on his head*). Rise! (*She throws off her rags and appears as a queen.*)

LEPER (*places his hand on child's head*). Rise! (*He throws off LEPER's robe and appears as a king.*)

SHOUTS OF PEOPLE. Our king! Our queen! Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!

QUEEN. This is thy father whom thou hast succoured.

KING. And this is thy mother whose feet thou hast washed with thy tears.

Song and Dance. Lohengrin Wedding March.

Long live the queen! Long live the king!
Long live the Star-child whose praises we sing.
Ting a ling ling! Ting a ling ling!
Long live the Star-child whose praises we sing.

THE END.

WHERE LOVE IS THERE GOD
IS ALSO

FROM THE STORY

BY

TOLSTOY

THE PEOPLE

MARTUIN THE COBBLER.	The Old Snow-shoveller.
VANYA, his nephew and apprentice.	The Woman and Her Baby.
An Old Friend.	The Old Apple-woman.
Three Roystering Com- panions.	A Naughty Boy.

THE PLACE

ACT I —Interior of a peasant's hut in Russia. Evening.

ACT II—The same. Twilight the following day.



THE COBBLER AND VANYA

WHERE LOVE IS THERE GOD IS ALSO

The scene represents the interior of a peasant's shabby hut. There is a door at the back and a small window at one side, with a bench beneath it, so that the child, VANYA, while kneeling upon it, can look out of doors. A cupboard hangs at the right, holding a nearly empty bottle of wine and several mugs. In front of this is a table and several chairs. If possible there should be a Russian hanging lamp above the table and a samovar, with a cup for the woman and a glass for the man. A broom rests in the corner and an old coat hangs against the wall. The COBBLER, a sad old man, is seated at his cobbler's bench; he strikes a few blows upon a shoe before and after the curtain rises. Suddenly he flings aside his tools and cries out.

COBBLER. What's the use? (*He rises and goes to the cupboard, takes bottle and glass and drinks; then he tips bottle to his mouth till it is empty. He sinks down beside table, holding his head in his hands.*) Ah, God, God, only to forget! Only to forget! His voice was so merry, my little Kapitosha. He loved me—so God took him. (*He rises and shakes his fist.*)

There is a knock. The COBBLER turns angrily. His old FRIEND enters.

THE FRIEND (*beaming*). Ah, Martuin, dost not remember me? (*He takes MARTUIN's hand.*) Man, I was with thee when thy son, thy little Kapitosha, was born.

COBBLER (*dully*). Aye, I remember thee.

THE FRIEND. Hast thou no welcome for an old friend—and at Christmas-tide? Fie, for shame, man!

COBBLER (*resentfully*). Why should I welcome any man at Christmas-tide? What is Christmas-tide to me?

THE FRIEND. Come, come, Martuin, you don't talk right. What ails thee? Remember the little child who was born one Christmas-tide to bless us all.

COBBLER. I remember *my* little child, my Kapitosha. He was my blessing, my own. God took him from me. Ah, I have no more desire to live; I only wish I were dead. That's what I pray. I have nothing more to live for—

THE FRIEND. Come, that's not right. The trouble is we all wish to live for our own happiness.

COBBLER (*defiantly*). Well, what else should one live for?

THE FRIEND. We can live for God.

COBBLER. Now look here, why should I live for God? I never lived a bad life; I always earned an honest living. Men would say, "There are no shoes so good as Martuin's; he is honest." My little son alone filled my life with joy—and God took him. Why should I live for God?

THE FRIEND. How shall I answer? Get thy Bible, man. Everything is made plain there.

COBBLER. I have none. When my son died I cleared my house of all that rubbish.

THE FRIEND. Ah, Martuin, Martuin—

There is a loud knocking at door.

VOICES OUTSIDE. Ho, Martuin, let us in, man. Ho, cobbler— (*Renewed knocking.*)

THE FRIEND. I will see thee again. God bless thee, man. (*The FRIEND goes.*)

The three boon companions swagger in.

FIRST MAN. Pfui! 'Tis bitter cold.

SECOND MAN. Thou art a civil fellow, Martuin, to keep us cooling our heels.

THIRD MAN. Give us now something to warm our bellies.

FIRST MAN. Martuin's a good fellow; he'll not grudge us a drop of vodka, eh?

The first man sits on the table swinging one leg; the others take stools. They burst into song:

For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fel-l-ow

COBBLER (*shouts*). Vanya! Ho, Vanya! (*VANYA enters timidly; he is a little lad.*) Step to the wineshop, boy, and bring plenty of vodka. (*VANYA puts on cap and muffler and slips out.*)

FIRST MAN. Where did you get the lad?

COBBLER. 'Tis my sister's child, apprenticed to learn my trade.

SECOND MAN (*with a wink at the others*). To learn thy trade, eh? Well, I wager he's learned the quickest way to the wineshop, eh, Martuin?

COBBLER. Thou liest; I am never drunk.

THIRD MAN (*wagging a finger and grinning*). Oh, Martuin! Martuin!

COBBLER (*more and more angry*). I say I never take too much.

FIRST MAN (*mockingly spreading out his hands*). Dear friends, at this blessed Christmas season, let us remember—

The COBBLER hits him. They sway struggling till others separate them.

SECOND MAN. Come, come, boys, a song!

SONG. Music—Come Lassies and Lads.

Come fill up your bowl; be merry, old soul.

And away to the wineshop hie.

For every lad shall have his lass

And the fiddler's standing by.

The COBBLER seats himself and shades his eyes with his hand while others sing. VANYA enters timidly with the wine. The THIRD MAN takes it and pours it into mugs. He takes one to MARTUIN. MARTUIN flings it to the floor. There is an uneasy silence.

FIRST MAN. Come, Martuin, heed not my jest.

SECOND MAN. Come, cobbler, we'll spend the night abroad.

THIRD MAN. There is a dance hall where the maids dance divinely. (*He kisses his finger-tips to them.*)

FIRST MAN. Come spend the night with us and if tomorrow thou hast a clear head to thread thy needle—why, I'll eat my words.

COBBLER (*looking up*). 'Tis a bargain boys; I'll go with you. Vanya, get to bed; I'll be late.

VANYA. O uncle, little uncle, thou wilt not leave me—not all alone. O uncle, I'm afeard—

COBBLER. Don't be a fool. Nothing can hurt thee.

VANYA (*clinging to him*). O uncle, if I were thy little son who died, thy Kapitoshka, thou wouldst not leave me all alone—on Christmas eve—

FIRST MAN (*under his breath*). Plague on the brat! (*Aloud*) Come, Martuin, heed not the child.

The COBBLER hesitates. A change has come over him at mention of Kapitoshka.

COBBLER. Nay, I'll bide here the night. In the morning the boy shall pack home to's mother. I'll no more o' sister's children.

SECOND MAN. Thou'rt but a weak fool, Martuin. Come along, boys. (*They swagger out singing.*)

COBBLER (*gruffly*). Now get to bed, boy.

VANYA slips away. The COBBLER seats himself at table with his head in his hands. VANYA re-enters bearing a small, lighted, red candle.

VANYA. See, little uncle, I've bought for thee a Christmas candle.

COBBLER. I don't keep Christmas.

VANYA (*very much disappointed*). Oh!

COBBLER (*relenting*). It was kindly meant, little nephew, but thou shouldest not waste thy silver.

VANYA (*adoringly*). But on *thee*!

There is a knock at the door.

COBBLER. Go, Vanya, see who knocks.

VANYA *goes out*. The COBBLER holds up the lighted candle and regards it curiously.

COBBLER. Why should the world pay tribute to a man who died two thousand years ago? (*He blows out candle*. VANYA *re-enters bearing a large book*.) Shut the door quickly, boy; it is bitter chill.

VANYA. Aye, little master. The poor folk shiver in the biting sleet; their hands are chapped and cold. Here it is warm.

COBBLER. Aye, warm! What have ye there?

VANYA. A man stood at the door. He said: "Give this to my old friend, to Martuin, and bid him—be glad again."

COBBLER (*takes book*). A testament! (*His lip curls scornfully*.) Does the fool think that in it I shall find gladness? Will it give me back my son?

VANYA (*curls up beside MARTUIN*). Read to me, little uncle, from thy fine new book.

COBBLER. Bah! (*He pushes book away*.)

VANYA (*whcedling*). Read just the Christmas story. (*MARTUIN shakes his head*.) Did'st thou not never read to thy little Kapitosha?

COBBLER. A year ago—only a year ago—yes, I will read it.

COBBLER (*reads*). Now it came to pass in those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And Joseph went also from Galilee to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife. And it came to pass while they were there the days were fulfilled. And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

VANYA. Was it not strange, little uncle, that they did not throw the doors open wide to welcome him, the Christ-child?

COBBLER (*dreamily*). Very strange! (*He reads on to himself.*)

VANYA (*reproachfully*). Thou dost not hear me.

COBBLER (*rousing*). Eh? Not strange at all! Joseph and Mary were poor folk—at least not rich. Who opens wide the door to such?

VANYA (*with faith*). Thou wouldest do so, little uncle. Read thou on.

COBBLER (*reads*). And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night, and the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory—

VANYA'S *sleepy head falls on the table with a thump*; MARTUIN *looks up*.

COBBLER (*scornfully*). A pretty tale! It does not show me how to live for God. (*He pushes the Bible away and reaches for the mug of wine. He hesitates, then pushes the wine away. Presently he opens the Bible again and reads to himself. Soon VANYA awakes and stretches himself.*)

VANYA (*sternly*). Thou readest to *thyself*.

COBBLER. Hark'ee, boy, thou rememberest the tale of how Jesus entered the house of Simon the Pharisee and how a woman that was a sinner anointed his feet

and washed them with her tears? (*He reads aloud.*) And Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon: Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house: thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss. But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. (*He takes off his spectacles and recites thoughtfully.*) Thou gavest me no water for my feet; thou gavest me no kiss; my head with oil thou didst not anoint. Ah, there be many Pharisees like Simon. Nay, he must have been very much such a man as I am. I too have thought only of myself, how I might have my tea and be comfortable. He too thought only of himself and took no thought for his guest. And who was his guest? The Lord himself. If He had come to me, should I have done the same way? If He had come to me? (*With elbows on the table he leans his head on his hands; suddenly he rouses.*) Who is there? Who spoke? (*VANYA raises a sleepy head.*) Didst thou speak, Vanya? Vanya, didst thou not hear?

VANYA (*shamefacedly*). I—I—dozed, little master.

COBBLER. One spoke—it was the Christ. He said: “Martuin, look tomorrow on the street: I am coming.” Didst thou hear, boy? The Christ will come tomorrow.

VANYA. Yea, little master.

COBBLER. Stranger things have been.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The scene is the same but it is late afternoon verging on twilight. Icicles hang outside the window. MARTUIN and VANYA are at the window looking out. Both bend forward eagerly at the same moment then draw back with disappointment.

COBBLER. Pshaw, Vanya, I'm just a fool, that's what I am, a fool. To expect the Christ this day! Foolishness!

VANYA. The day is not yet done, little master.

COBBLER (*keeps muttering*). Just an old dotard, that's me. (*He goes to his bench.*) Come, Vanya, only the shoes of those I know pass yonder. Come thou; these shoes must be done.

VANYA *comes reluctantly and gives aid.*

COBBLER. There's no fool like an old fool.

VANYA. Oh! Oh! (*He rushes to window.*) Ai! Strange shoes, little master! (*With disgust*) Na! It is only the house porter with new boots. (*Coaxingly*) Could I not help thee all the same, little uncle, if I sat here and told thee all who passed—while *thou* finish the shoes?

COBBLER. Eh, well. Then do thou glue thy nose to the pane, and if a stranger pass—

VANYA (*chuckles*). There hobbles the old water-carrier, him with the red nose. (*More seriously*) How shall the Christ look, little uncle?

COBBLER (*bending over his shoe*). I know not, little nephew.

VANYA. Will he be clothed in white robes like the pictures, or in furs like the rich merchants?

COBBLER. I—know—not.

VANYA (*with great anxiety*). How shall we know him? (*He turns back to window and rubs his hands.*) Ai! But it is cold. (*There is a pause.*) Little master, look! The old snow-shoveller, he doth not move. (*Knocks at pane.*) Hi, old man, wake up. Thou'lt freeze.

COBBLER (*goes to window*). Poor fellow! (*Taps on pane and beckons.*) Come in, man, come in. (*Goes to samovar and pours tea into glass.*)

The old SNOW-SHOVELLER enters wiping his feet.

COBBLER. Come in, warm yourself a little; you must be cold.

SNOW-SHOVELLER. May Christ reward you! My bones ache all through. (*He staggers slightly.*)

COBBLER. Don't trouble to wipe your feet; I'll clean up. Drink a cup of tea. (*He gives him the glass and goes to window.*)

VANYA sweeps up snow.

SNOW-SHOVELLER. Are you expecting anyone, friend cobbler?

COBBLER (*seats himself and takes a glass of tea*). Well, to tell you the truth, I am and I am not. I'm most likely a fool. (*Leans forward.*) See you, brother, I was reading yesterday the gospel of the Christ—I suppose you know—

SNOW-SHOVELLER. I have heard it spoken. We poor folk are people of darkness; we can't read.

COBBLER. Well, I read of how Jesus came to the Pharisee, but the Pharisee don't treat him hospitably. Well, I thought to myself, if He should come to me would I receive Him any better? And, do you know, just then while I was thinking I heard a voice. It said: "Martuin, Martuin, be on the watch. I shall come tomorrow." Just like that! Well, I dreamed it, I suppose. I scold myself, and yet—I'm expecting Him.

The SNOW-SHOVELLER slowly shakes his head and says nothing.

COBBLER. Have some more tea. (*He fills the other's glass.*) You see I have an idea when the Christ was here he most always went with simple people, sinners like ourselves of the working class. "You," says He, "call me 'Lord'; and I," says He, "wash your feet. Who-soever wishes," says He, "to be first, the same shall be the servant of all. Because," says He, "Blessed are the poor, the humble, the kind, the generous."

There is a long silence; then the SNOW-SHOVELLER rises slowly.

SNOW-SHOVELLER. Aye, aye. Thanks to thee, cobbler, for treating me kindly and for satisfying me, body and soul.

COBBLER. You're welcome, brother. Come again.

The SNOW-SHOVELLER goes. MARTUIN wraps up the finished shoe.

VANYA (*at window*). There goes the baker with his buns, and some soldiers with their collars well turned up about their ears. Ai! There goes a grand lady with a velvet hood, and one with nothing on her head at all. My, but she looks cold. And her baby—see!

COBBLER (*goes to door*). Hey, my good woman, why art thou standing there with the child? Come in here where it is warm. (*The WOMAN enters.*) Come in, sit by the stove and nurse the child.

WOMAN. I have nothing to feed him. I myself have not eaten since yesterday.

COBBLER (*shakes his head as he puts food before her*). Eat. I will mind the little one. (*Takes child on his knee, clucking to it.*) There, little rooster! Sh! Sh! My pretty.

WOMAN (*eating*). You are good, master.

COBBLER. Tsht! I myself had a son once.

WOMAN. My husband is a soldier. For seven months I have not heard from him. I cannot find work, being burdened with a child. But my landlady is kind and lets me stay.

COBBLER. Have you no warm clothes?

WOMAN. I pawned my shawl yesterday for food.

COBBLER (*goes to wall and takes down coat*). It is a poor thing, but you may make use of it.

WOMAN (*bursts into tears*). May Christ bless you, little grandfather. My child would have frozen but for

you. When I started out this morning it was milder. Now it bites. The Christ himself must have sent me to your window.

COBBLER (*musingly*). Maybe. I have been watching for Him.

WOMAN. Wh—what do you mean?

COBBLER. I had a—dream, shall we call it, that the Christ said He would come to me this day.

WOMAN. Eh, all things are possible. (*She wraps baby in coat.*)

COBBLER (*giving her silver*). Take this, for Christ's sake, and redeem your shawl.

WOMAN. May God bless you. (*She goes.*)

The light outside grows dimmer.

VANYA. It is getting dark, little master. Dost thou suppose—O could it have been the devil who spoke to thee, and not the Christ?

COBBLER (*arranging food on table*). I think not, little one. Now come and eat thy supper.

VANYA. Oh, look, look! The old apple-woman has fallen on the ice. Her red apples bob this way and that. (*He jumps up and down with glee.*) Just see the boys go for 'em. She won't have left a single one.

As VANYA speaks, MARTUIN hastens out of doors; loud voices are heard.

COBBLER (*outside*). Hi, you there!

APPLE-BOY. You leggo!

APPLE-WOMAN. You limb o' Satan!

MARTUIN *enters holding the APPLE-WOMAN by the arm. She is dragging a boy by the scruff of his neck. He kicks and struggles.*

APPLE-WOMAN. Thou son of evil! Thou lost child of Satan! I'll cuff thee! I'll pay thee. I'll—

BOY (*squirming*). Lemme go. I didn't take your apples. (*He drops the one he is holding.*) What're you lickin' me for? Lemme go. (*With a final kick he breaks away.*)

The APPLE-WOMAN chases him about the room; MARTUIN catches her arm.

APPLE-WOMAN. Thou brat! I'll have ye before the police. I'll lesson ye. (*Catches him and shakes him.*) They'll lock thee up. Ai! They'll lick thee well and pickle thee, thou little devil—

THE BOY (*whimpers*).

COBBLER. Let him go, old woman; he'll never do it again. Let him go for Christ's sake. (*She relaxes her grip; the BOY starts out of the door. MARTUIN catches him.*) Ask the little old woman's pardon. I saw you take the apple. Shame! From a little old woman like that! And thou a husky lad!

APPLE-WOMAN (*tossing her head*). Not so old, neither!

BOY (*grins*). All right! I'm sorry, little grandmother. (*Then he adds simply.*) But it seemed such a wonderful chance to get an apple.

COBBLER. That's right, son. (*He takes apple from WOMAN'S bag and gives to BOY.*) Here's an apple for thee. (*To WOMAN.*) I'll pay thee.

APPLE-WOMAN. You ruin 'em that way, the good-for-nothings! He ought to be punished so he'd remember it a whole week.

COBBLER. Eh, little mother, that's right according to our judgment, but not according to God's. God has commanded us to forgive. All should be forgiven, little children especially.

APPLE-WOMAN. But children are so spoiled. I know. I spoiled seven in the raising—and now I have to work in my old age. (*She turns to BOY.*) I reckon your mischief is just the natural boy in you. Be off.

BOY (*lifting her bag*). All right, little grandmother, I'll carry your bag for you. It's on my way. (*He goes off whistling.*)

APPLE-WOMAN. Thanks, little son. God be with you, cobbler. (*She follows the Boy.*)

VANYA (*at the window*). He's holding her carefully so she won't slip.

COBBLER. Come, Vanya, draw the shade and bring a light. It's growing dark. Come, I will read to thee.

VANYA *draws curtain over window; it becomes very dark. While the room is dark, the old SNOW-SHOVELLER, the WOMAN and her baby, the APPLE-WOMAN and BOY slip in and hide in shadow. VANYA lights the lamp or brings a candle to table. He nestles close to MARTUIN. MARTUIN opens the Bible.*

VANYA (*points*). Read to me here—where the picture is of all the people.

COBBLER. Here? (*He reads.*) Then shall the king say: "Come ye blessed of my father: for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me, sick and in prison and ye visited me—"

VANYA (*runs to window and peers out*). Look! It is dark. I fear, little master, the Christ, He will not come.

COBBLER. Maybe—maybe—our eyes are holden—(*He becomes lost in reverie. VANYA bends over book, making his lips go as though reading. Suddenly MARTUIN rises, startled.*) Who's there?

The SNOW-SHOVELLER steps out of shadow.

SNOW-SHOVELLER. Ah, Martuin, did you not recognize me?

COBBLER. Who? Who?

SNOW-SHOVELLER. The hungry and ye fed me! May God reward you! (*He passes out.*)

The WOMAN with her baby steps from shadow.

WOMAN. And me? The naked and ye clothed me! May God bless thee! (*She goes.*)

The APPLE-WOMAN and BOY step into light.

APPLE-WOMAN. And me? In the prison of my anger, ye visited me. God be with thee! (*They go.*)

VANYA (*who has read and seen nothing, looks up*). See, little uncle, I too can read. Do thou listen. (*He reads laboriously.*) "Then shall he"—the king, you know—"answer them saying, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto me.'" (*He looks up inquiringly.*) What exactly does it mean, little master?

COBBLER. It means—THE CHRIST HAS VISITED US THIS DAY.

THE END.



THE COBBLER AND HIS VISITORS

THE HAPPY MAN

FROM OLD GREEK LEGEND

THE PEOPLE

A KING.

FIVE DOCTORS.

TWO SOLDIERS.

A RICH MAN.

A POOR MAN.

TWO MEN WHO GROAN.

A BEGGAR.

THE PLACE

ACT I —A room in the King's Palace.

ACT II—The same. A year later.



THE FIVE LEARNED DOCTORS

THE HAPPY MAN

(*The quotations are from "The Enchanted Shirt" by John Hay.*)

As the curtain rises five doctors are discovered standing in a semi-circle. They wag their heads gravely.

FIRST DOCTOR (*in middle*). Ahem, most worthy sirs, ye have been chosen out as those most skilled in all the realm, in discovering for man his ills. The King is sick; say, what is his disease?

All speak confusedly at the same moment.

FIRST DOCTOR (*imploringly*). One at a time, I pray you.

SECOND DOCTOR. His disease is of the heart—

THIRD DOCTOR. His disease is of the head—

FOURTH DOCTOR. His disease is of the brain—

FIFTH DOCTOR. He has no disease. (*The other doctors look scandalized.*) I say he is not ill.

OTHER DOCTORS. NOT ILL!

SECOND DOCTOR (*considering*). True, his eye is bright—

THIRD DOCTOR. And his color good!

FOURTH DOCTOR. And his appetite—amazing!—

FIFTH DOCTOR (*triumphantly*). "And his sleep at night undisturbed even by his own snoring!"

OTHER DOCTORS (*hold up hands of horror*). Treason! His Majesty does not snore; he only sleeps with heaviness.

FIRST DOCTOR. But the King says he IS ill. My good sirs, it only remains for us to discover the malady.

SECOND DOCTOR. Yea, verily, the King is ill; but the nature of his malady is hidden.

THIRD DOCTOR. What matter the name? Prescribe. In the course of a long practice I have found it wise to trouble myself but little over the nature of a disease. "For, look you, sirs, if your patient recover, he will pay you well, and if he recover not—(*shrugs with a slow grin*)—why his heirs will pay you—double." Ha, ha! (*All laugh.*)

The KING's voice sounds without.

KING. Where are those rascal doctors? Hither to me!

FIRST, SECOND, THIRD DOCTORS (*trembling*). Yea, yea, Majesty, we come, we come. (*They hurry out.*)

FOURTH DOCTOR (*to fifth*). Good friend, use thy wits and save us. Thou art the mightiest in wisdom; do thou prescribe for the King?

FIFTH DOCTOR (*striding up and down*). Pah! If the King is ill, it is that he hath over-eaten—

FOURTH DOCTOR (*in a panic*). Sh! Sh! On thy life, say it not. (*He casts a scared glance at the KING's closet.*)

FIFTH DOCTOR. He needeth air, exercise for the body and for the brain. He hath been too much indulged. Cross him—

FOURTH DOCTOR (*ironically*). And lose my head for my pains? I thank thee, no! Nay, we must prescribe for him a pleasing prescription—

FIFTH DOCTOR. And when that fails to cure him—as fail it will—then thou wilt hang all the more surely.

FOURTH DOCTOR. I have an idea. Hark'ee: We must not prescribe a thing too easily come by, a thing which he may obtain today and test tomorrow, and for which he may hang us the day after. Nay, nay! The remedy which we prescribe must be a thing which shall be found with difficulty.

FIFTH DOCTOR. All foolery!

FOURTH DOCTOR. Not so! I have a love for this, my head. It shall not part company with my body sooner than need be. Yonder comes the King; let us withdraw and take counsel together. (*They go.*)

Enter the KING, followed by trembling DOCTORS and two SOLDIERS. The KING is in a dressing gown, a crown, and a rage.

KING (*stamping in*). Oddsbodikins! But ye are fools and knaves!

FIRST DOCTOR (*soothingly*). Your Majesty's digestion is impaired; else he would not so miscall his servants.

SECOND DOCTOR. Nay, sire, it is a weakness of the heart. Do not, I pray thee, over excite thyself—

THIRD DOCTOR (*haughtily*). If your Majesty call me "knave," it proves my point; thy sickness is of the brain—

KING (*with an angry gesture*). Be silent! Silence! SILENCE! SILENCE! Take them away, and let them all be flogged, and rip their doctors' coats from off their backs, and give them to my fool—

DOCTORS (*flinging themselves at his feet*). Mercy, mercy, lord! Take thou our lives, but shame us not.

KING. I have spoken. Drive them away, far from the castle walls.

The SOLDIERS prick the DOCTORS with their spears, and assist them out with their toes.

KING. Oddszooks! Shall I, a sick man, be left thus alone? Shall I suffer, and not make others suffer too? Where are those other doctors? Hither, you dogs!

The FOURTH and FIFTH DOCTORS enter, bowing low.

FOURTH DOCTOR. O sire, we did but consult together, a consultation, sire, to free you—

KING (*wrathfully*). CONSULTATION? CONSPIRACY! YOU DOGS!

FIFTH DOCTOR (*advancing boldly*). The King says true; it was a conspiracy—to fool the King; and I'll have no part in it. (*The face of the FOURTH DOCTOR is a picture of consternation.*) Your Majesty, I offer you the truth—

KING (*shrinking in his chair*). Nay, spare me— Do not tell me that my sickness is—

FIFTH DOCTOR. Your Majesty is *NOT* sick; thy indisposition cometh from over-indulgence, which maketh the mind sluggish and the body sad. Arouse thee! Take no more thought for thy body and its sins. Go thou throughout thy kingdom, where the great oppress the weak, where the rich man avoideth thy tax and where the beggar pays, where justice is to the strong; go thou, I say, and right all wrongs—

KING (*who has grown more and more infuriated*). Odds—bod—i—kins!

FIFTH DOCTOR (*severely*). And it shall come to pass—

KING (*in a towering passion*). Oddszooks! Odds—odds—odds— Take him away! Hang him! HANG HIM! HANG HIM to the topmost tower—

FIFTH DOCTOR (*as SOLDIERS lay hands on him*). Sire, I but told truth.

KING (*calming down*). Truth should be told to kings—with discretion. You have no tact, a capital offense. Away with him. (*SOLDIERS drag him away. To FOURTH DOCTOR, suspiciously.*) And art thou a truth-teller, too?

FOURTH DOCTOR. Yea, Majesty, but my pills are sugar-coated.

KING (*with relief*). It is well.

DOCTOR. Your Majesty is languid, restless, discontented, can find pleasure in naught—

KING (*leaning back and offering pulse*). Thou hast said it.

DOCTOR. Thy rich dishes pall upon thee.

KING. Yea.

DOCTOR. In short, the King is unhappy—I should say ill.

KING. Verily thou canst diagnose with skill, but canst thou find a remedy?

DOCTOR (*thoughtfully*). Some doctors that I know would prescribe juice of the crocodile from the banks of the Nile. Others would say that star-dust mixed in the full o' the moon with poppy-juice grown on forbidden soil, would cure the King—but I say none of these.

KING (*eagerly*). What can it be?

DOCTOR. A little thing! But let the King make search and find a happy man, and from him borrow his shoes, and let the King walk in them but one day, and he will find the way to happiness.

KING. So little a thing! Will that indeed bring happiness—and health?

DOCTOR (*in a peculiar tone*). So little a thing!

KING. Ho, guard, attend here! (*Guards salute.*) Go out into the streets and bring ye in each man ye meet that I may question him.

SOLDIERS. The King shall be obeyed. (*They go.*)

DOCTOR. Ahem, doth the King give me leave to go?

KING. No, no, my friend. I beg of thee, stay with me, till I am well.

DOCTOR (*bowing*). The King shall be obeyed. I will return. I go only to order that my trunks be hither brought, my instruments, my phials, my books and charts, my coats for winter and for spring and fall—(*the KING looks astounded*)—for I will dwell with thee against the time the King shall find A HAPPY MAN.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II—The same.

The KING, dressed in velvet, and the DOCTOR, are seated with table between them on which is a jug and two goblets. Both are oppressed with weariness. The DOCTOR yawns. Presently the KING looks up.

KING. Knowest thou what day this is?

DOCTOR. Lo, all days are alike—

KING. It was a year ago today thou did'st prescribe a remedy; the remedy is yet to find.

DOCTOR. Who would have dreamed it was so hard to find a happy man.

KING. Methinks all men of my kingdom have passed through these doors, and all with cause for sadness.

DOCTOR (*drinking*). Yea, it is truly a malignant contagion—sadness. The spirit must be well fortified to escape.

KING (*looking out of window*). Now hither cometh a man. His look is sleek and satisfied, and yet—(*Calls.*) Enter, my man! (*Enter the RICH MAN between SOLDIERS.*) Come hither, merchant. Thou lookest prosperous, in good health. Thou bearest the marks of comfort, yea of wealth. Speak, art thou happy?

RICH MAN. Happy! Sire, I? O sire, why should I be happy? Thou sayest I have great wealth. Nay, lord, not so. There be a thousand men in this thy kingdom wealthier far than I. Now if I had—treble my income—

KING (*angrily*). Thrust him out of doors. (*SOLDIERS kick him out.*) 'Tis ever so. Each seeks to outstrip his fellows.

DOCTOR (*at window*). I see a man, a decent, jolly peasant, with a goodly shirt in noble rags. (*Opens window and calls.*) Ho, fellow, hither to the King! No doubt he is well frightened. Enter, my man.

The POOR MAN enters timidly.

KING. Come forward; do not fear. (*Surveys him.*) So! Thou art a poor man. Thou hast naught to lose and naught to worry over. Thou art free. No riches burden thee. Thou shouldest be a happy man.

POOR MAN (*indignantly*). I? Happy! When I do not know where my next meal will come from? When I fear my shirt will fall to tatters? Sire, NO! (*Regards KING cunningly and ingratiatingly.*) Now had I your fine robe, and could I stretch my limbs beneath your well-filled board—

KING (*offers him a robe*). Take thou this robe. Moreover, I shall give orders that thou shalt receive both meat and drink each day. Thou needest fear no more for food and shelter—

POOR MAN. O sire, O sire, thy goodness overwhelms—

KING. Now tell me true, art *thou a happy man?*

POOR MAN (*hesitates*). I should be, sire, only that I fear—I mean I am afraid— If your Majesty should die—or change his mind.

DOCTOR. Good heavens!

KING (*wearily*). Go thou. Thou shalt be given food and drink each day, yet I see plainly thou can'st never be a happy man. (*POOR MAN goes, mumbling thanks. A pause, then suddenly the KING speaks.*) There is no happy man.

FIRST SOLDIER. O King, two men are waiting but they cannot be those whom ye seek.

KING. Admit them.

They admit two men whose groans are heard afar.

KING. Come hither, fellows. Why are ye sad? (*Men groan.*) I command ye, speak!

FIRST MAN. "Oh, Oh! I have buried me a wife; she just hath died. Oh! Oh!"

KING. Hum! (*To other.*) And thou? Is thy wife likewise dead?

SECOND MAN. "Lord, no! That is the chiefest cause of all my woe. Oh! Oh!"

KING (*rising angrily*). Be gone! (*SOLDIERS hustle men out.*) I am become the sport of all my kingdom; this must cease. No longer shall I seek a happy man.

DOCTOR (*earnestly*). O King, the remedy is near. Surely I may speak truth at last.

KING. Speak.

DOCTOR. Go thou throughout thy kingdom, right all wrongs; seek to make people happy; it may be thou wilt thyself become the happy man.

KING (*slowly*). It is well spoken. I will do it.

He rises; there comes a loud shouting from without.

SHOUTING. A happy man! A happy man! Good news, Lord! Lord, a happy man!

KING. Can it be?

FIRST SOLDIER *hastens in.*

FIRST SOLDIER. O King, we found him by the roadside, whistling a stave, outside the village gate. He seemed so happy that we asked him, "Friend, what makes you glad?" He answered us, "The rain, the sun, the wind, the dew, my brother man, the whole green earth!"

SECOND SOLDIER *enters with* BEGGAR.

KING. Let me also hear him speak. (*To* BEGGAR.) And art thou really, truly happy, friend?

BEGGAR (*coming easily forward, laughs merrily*). Lo, what should make me sad? I am well; my friends are many; the whole earth conspires to make me glad—and it is spring! Why should I fear old age and want and woe? Today I live and I am glad.

KING (*tremulously*). O friend, I have nothing to offer thee; but as a man and a brother, thou, the beggar, can'st give to me, the King.

BEGGAR (*smiling*). What would you have?



THE HAPPY MAN

KING. It hath been told me that I would be well could I but find a happy man—

BEGGAR (*in wonder*). And then?

KING. Borrow his shoes and walk in them—(BEGGAR *grins.*)—wilt lend? But for a day? (*The BEGGAR laughs gleefully.*) Why dost thou laugh?

BEGGAR (*chuckles*). Ho, ho, ho, ho! I would lend them, God wot; But as for shoes—Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho. God knows—I have them not. (*Holds up bare toes. Roars with laughter.*)

END.

A SPARK NEGLECTED BURNS THE
HOUSE

FROM THE STORY

BY

TOLSTOY

THE PEOPLE

GAVRILO, a Peasant.	ROSTOF, His Son.
TATIA, His Wife.	THE JUDGE.
PETYA, His Son.	THE CONSTABLE.
SONIA, His Daughter.	THE CLERK.
IVAN, His Neighbor.	AN OLD WOMAN.
IVANOVNA, Ivan's Wife.	SEVERAL MEN.
NATASHA,	UNCLE FROL, Ivan's Father.
MARYA, His Daughters.	

THE PLACE

ACT I —The Interior of a Russian Hut (Gavrilo's).

ACT II —The Courtroom.

ACT III—The road near Ivan's House.

The men are dressed in white blouses and black baggy trousers with heavy rubber or leather boots. They wear bright sashes wound twice about body and high fur or cloth hats. The women wear skirts embroidered with flowers, white blouses and shawls.

A SPARK NEGLECTED BURNS THE HOUSE

ACT I—The Interior of Gavriilo's Cottage.

GAVRILO *is seated at table; TATIA is attending to his needs. The children are seated on the floor in front of him counting colored Easter eggs.*

TATIA (*at samovar*). Tea, little father?

GAVRILO (*holding out glass*). Fill it up. Fill it up.

TATIA. One egg or two?

GAVRILO (*indulgently*). Nay, give them to the boy for Easter-tide. Petya, thy poor father goeth hungry that thou mayest have more colored foolishness at Easter-tide.

SONIA (*springing forward*). Give me one, father. Petya, he hath nine, and I have only—six—

PETYA (*runs to TATIA*). They're mine! They're mine!

TATIA *takes eggs to GAVRILO and continues serving him as she speaks.*

SONIA. Father, give me an egg, dear little father? (*Strokes his face.*)

TATIA. The hens don't lay well.

GAVRILO (*taking SONIA on his knee*). Why, I remember when our next door neighbor Ivan and I were boys together, we'd hide whole baskets full of colored eggs at Easter-tide.

TATIA. The good old days! The hens don't lay the same now.

GAVRILO. D'you mind Ivan in those days? As good-hearted a lad as ever drew breath, but now—he's not the good neighbor he used to be.

TATIA. And his wife—good lands! In the old days 'twould be, "Ivanovna," I'd say to her, "lend me your wash-tub," and she'd say, "With pleasure." Or she would say to me, "We're out of meal," and I'd say, "Take some of ours;" but now—

SONIA. Now she don't like it if we go her side of the fence.

TATIA (*indignant*). Well, did you ever! You stay this side then. Why, I remember when her calf got loose and trampled down our garden, all I said was, "Tie the calf up tighter next time, my girl."

GAVRILO. Too bad! Too bad! It was different once; but now the old man's helpless, Ivan's become a mean neighbor.

TATIA. Aye, that he has, and Ivanovna, too.

GAVRILO (*rising*). Well, well, the tools need mending. (TATIA *brings his coat*.)

PETYA (*runs to him*). But father, I want my egg.

GAVRILO (*divides them*). Here's one for each. (*He goes out*.)

TATIA *busies herself at stove*.

PETYA (*whines*). He promised I should have both.

SONIA. Piggy-pig! (*She holds her egg up exultingly*.)

PETYA. 'N I want my egg! I want my *Easter egg*. (*He makes a grab for it. The egg falls between them and breaks. There is a dismayed silence*.)

TATIA (*coming toward them*). Now, just see! Now neither shall have an egg. (*She puts PETYA'S egg on table, boxes their ears and puts them in opposite corners and sweeps up mess*.)

There is a knock at the door.

TATIA (*opens door*). Good-day to you, Ivanovna. What do you wish?

IVANOVA *enters*.

IVANOVNA (*embarrassed*). Well—my little hen flew over into your yard today. I heard her cackle, but I hadn't time to go and hunt the egg; I said to myself, I'll go and get it by and by. 'N I just went to get it and there was no sign of it anywhere, but my boy, Rostof, he said the little hen flew into Gavriło's yard and laid the egg there. So I came to hunt for it.

TATIA (*coldly*). We haven't seen it at all. Our own hens, thank God, have been laying well this long time. We, my little girl, never go into other people's yards to collect *our* eggs.

IVANOVNA (*growing purple*). What! What! You mean I— (*Catches sight of egg on table.*) Ah, you—you—thief! With my egg staring me in the face! That's what you are, a mean, horrid thief!

TATIA. Thief your own self! Coming here for our eggs! (*Laughs irritatingly.*) What gulls you must think us.

IVANOVNA (*springing toward egg*). I'll have my egg.

TATIA (*springing to prevent her*). No you don't! (*The women struggle for egg.*)

PETYA (*dancing up and down in corner*). That's mine! That's my egg! Mine!

SONIA. No, mine!

IVANOVNA. Liar!

TATIA. Thief! Mean little beggar that you are!

IVANOVNA (*calls*). Help! Help! Rostof!

TATIA. Ah, you would, would you? You just get out of my house.

ROSTOF *rushes in*.

ROSTOF. Eh, what're you doing? You just let my mother alone. (*Joins fray.*)

SONIA. Pinch him, Petya; pinch him.

PETYA. Get out of our house; get out! (*Fights ROSTOF.*)

SONIA (*rushes to door and cries*). Father, father, come quick; they're murdering mother.

The struggle continues. In a moment GAVRILO enters.

GAVRILO (*trying to separate them*). Hey, what's this? Let up, women; let up, I say.

TATIA. She called me thief.

IVANOVNA. I'll have my rights. Take that! And that! And that! (*Slaps her.*)

GAVRILO (*seizes IVANOVNA's wrist*). Here, woman, go home; go home, I say. (*He again separates them and shoves IVANOVNA to door.*)

IVAN enters followed by old UNCLE FROL.

IVAN. What's the trouble? (*IVANOVNA rushes to him and weeps on his shoulder. To GAVRILO.*) Ah, it's a bad neighbor you are. (*Pats IVANOVNA.*) There, there, dushenka.

TATIA. Eh, she says her hen cackled so she comes to steal an egg of ours.

IVANOVNA (*sniffing*). She lies, Ivan; that's our egg on the table.

PETYA and SONIA. It isn't yours; it's ours.

IVAN (*holds out hand sternly*). Give us our egg.

GAVRILO (*in sudden fury, holds up egg*). You say this is your egg? Then take it! (*Flings egg in IVAN's face.*)

The men grapple and fight amid shrieks and jeers. ROSTOF cries: Ai! Ai! PETYA cries: Go it! Go it! TATIA cries: Thieves! Pick-pockets! IVANOVNA cries: Liar! Liar! Presently the men fall apart. IVAN's coat is torn but he holds a bit of GAVRILO's whiskers in his hand. He drops it; GAVRILO stoops for it.

GAVRILO (*wraps whiskers in paper*). Ai, you shall go to prison for this? See! See! I did not grow whiskers for a pig-head like you to pull them out.

IVAN. I didn't pull them out; but you, you have ripped the coat right off my back. You shall pay.

UNCLE FROL (*steps forward*). Children, you are acting foolishly.

IVAN (*impatiently*). Eh, father, you don't understand.

UNCLE FROL. I understand. It was from a piece of foolishness the whole thing started. Just think, the whole trouble is about an egg. Ivan, my son, suppose GavriLO's children did pick up a little egg, why let them have it. One egg isn't worth much. God has enough for all.

SONIA and PETYA. We didn't pick it up. It's ours! It's ours!

UNCLE FROL. Well, you've had your fight. We are all sinners. Such things happen. Now make it up and all will be forgotten. If you act from spite things will go on from bad to worse.

GAVRILO. You don't understand, old man.

IVAN. Would you swallow an insult?

UNCLE FROL (*simply*). I would.

IVAN (*violently*). Well, I wouldn't. They've called my wife a liar and a thief. Shall I take it calmly and say, thank you? Bah! (*To GAVRILO.*) Just you wait! I'll get even with you.

GAVRILO (*shoving him to door*). Get out of here! Get out! (*All follow to door save UNCLE FROL.*)

UNCLE FROL (*picks up egg shell and looks at it*). Just an egg! All about an egg! A little egg!

CURTAIN.

ACT II—The Courtroom. Several Months Later.

The JUDGE is seated at his desk. The CLERK sits at his left. The CONSTABLE and GAVRILO stand at left. IVAN stands at right.

IVAN (*is speaking as curtain rises*). You see, your Excellency, it's this way. Gavrilo's a bad neighbor, that's what he is. For a long time now he's been trying to get even with me because I pulled out his whiskers. When I lose things I know where they're gone. And now he's knocked my wife down—he's a thief and a bully—

GAVRILO. Your Excellency, must I stand here and be called a thief while—

JUDGE. Silence!

GAVRILO. That's what his wife, Ivanovna, called me, too, a thief. What have I stolen? Let 'em prove it, that's what I say.

IVAN. Your honor, he knocked my wife down. She's been in bed a whole week because he knocked her down. He might have killed her.

GAVRILO. She called me thief—and I'll knock you down, too, if—

JUDGE (*pounds for order*). Silence! Silence, I say. Let the woman be brought.

IVAN. Your honor—

GAVRILO. Listen, your Excellency—

The JUDGE holds up his hand; they are silent. CONSTABLE brings IVANOVNA.

JUDGE. Your name, woman?

IVANOVNA (*limps forward and courtesies*). Ivanovna, your Ex-cellency.

JUDGE (*points to IVAN*). That man's wife?

IVANOVNA (*courtesies again*). If it please your Ex-cellency.

JUDGE. Well, Ivanovna, you swear to tell the truth?

IVANOVNA. May my mouth be withered if I lie.

JUDGE. Did this man (*Nods toward GAVRILO.*) knock you down?

IVANOVNA. Yes, yes, your Excellency. I was in bed for a month; I can hardly walk. He knocked me down just because I called him "Thief." And that's what he is—

JUDGE. Be quiet, woman. (*To GAVRILO.*) Do you deny this?

GAVRILO (*sullenly*). No, your Honor, I was mad. I didn't mean to hurt her, but they're mean to me, both of 'em, always trying to—

JUDGE. No more. (*He pushes spectacles down on nose and confers with CLERK. Looks up.*) Attention all. (*All stand at attention.*) Gavriilo, the son of Gordyei, shall be punished with twenty lashes on the bare back, the sentence to take place Wednesday week in presence of the court. Next case. (*He leans back absorbed in his papers.*)

There is a short pause. GAVRILO has listened as though he could hardly believe his ears. His face darkens. He turns to go. IVANOVNA darts up to him.

IVANOVNA. Ai, be not so ready with your fists next time, neighbor.

GAVRILO *glares at her and brushes past her muttering something.*

IVANOVNA (*rushes to JUDGE*). Ai, your Excellency, your Excellency, hear what Gavriilo has just said. He's threatened to set our house on fire.

JUDGE. Eh, what?

IVANOVNA. He said, "All right," said he. "Ivan will have my back lashed; it will burn. Let him look out that something of his does not burn also."

JUDGE (*to GAVRILO*). Is it true you said so?

GAVRILO (*sullenly*). I said nothing. Lash me since you have the power.

JUDGE (*worried*). See here, brothers, you had better make up your minds to become friends again. You, brother Gavriilo, did you do right in striking the baba? It is fortunate for you that God spared her, else what a sin you might have committed! Was it right? Confess and ask his pardon; he will forgive and then we'll change the sentence.

CLERK (*rises*). This cannot be done, your honor. The Judge's sentence was passed and must be carried out.

JUDGE (*pays no heed to him*). Remember God. God has commanded that you become reconciled. And the man asked Jesus: How often shall I forgive my brother? Seven times? And Jesus answered—eh? How goes it, brothers? Till seventy times seven!

GAVRILO. I am old—and I was never beaten in my life—but now this pig-head Vanka has brought me under the lash—and yet I am to ask his forgiveness, am I? Well—let him look out for me. (*He turns and goes.*)

The JUDGE makes gesture of washing hands; the CLERK shrugs; IVAN looks sad.

CURTAIN.

ACT III—The Road Near Ivan's House.

Against a dark blue background an outhouse of IVAN's shows from road. Trunks of trees, made of long, dark strips of canvas, stand at intervals. The simplest lighting effect is as follows: A few red lights in front; a few lights at back over which blue and red slides may be passed and a red bulb in the outhouse. At the beginning of the act the red lights are dark and the blue slide is over lights at back, showing evening. UNCLE FROL is seated on a bench at side of road. To him enter IVAN.

UNCLE FROL. Well, was Gavriilo sentenced?

IVAN. Sentenced to twenty lashes.

UNCLE FROL (*shakes his head*). You are doing wrong—ah, wrong, Ivan—not to him but to yourself. Because I am old and nearly helpless, you think you see it all and I see nothing. No, young man, you see nothing at all; anger has blinded your eyes.

IVAN. My father, it is a just, a righteous anger. Shall he be allowed to—

UNCLE FROL. There *is* no righteous anger. You say he did wrong. If he were the only man to do wrong there would be no wickedness in the world. There must be two in a quarrel.

IVAN. But, father—

UNCLE FROL. Who pulled out his beard? Who threw down his hay-rick? Yet you blame him for everything.

IVAN. Well, haven't I paid? Fifty roubles in fines—

UNCLE FROL. Ah, that isn't the way his old father and I used to live; that isn't the way I taught you. How did we live? Like good neighbors. If he was out of flour his wife would say: "Uncle Frol, we are out of flour." "Just go to the closet, young woman," I would say, "and get what you need." And whatever I need, I go to him and say: "Uncle Gordyei, I need such and such a thing." "Take it, Uncle Frol," says he. And it used to be the same nice way with you; how is it now?

IVAN. It's his fault. Anyhow, the Judge sentenced him.

UNCLE FROL. Suppose they lash his back, what good will it do?

IVAN. He won't do it any more.

UNCLE FROL. What won't he do any more? Is he doing anything worse than you do?

IVAN. Well, he nearly killed my wife, and just now he threatened to set my house afire. Must I—

IVAN'S *children run in.*

ROSTOF. Daddy, he spat on me.

IVAN. Who?

ROSTOF. Petya, Gavriló's son; he always jeers at me.

NATASHA. And Sonia, too! They call us names, *wicked, bad* names!

ROSTOF. That Petya, he trips me up at school.

MARYA. He pulls my hair.

ROSTOF. I'll fight him when I get big. You'll see! You'll see! (*The children run off.*)

IVAN (*to* UNCLE FROL). You see! They're bad neigh—

UNCLE FROL (*sternly*). I see. You are the master of your house; what are you teaching your wife and children? To fight like dogs! You will have to answer for it. Is this what Christ taught us: You give me an angry word; I give you two back. You give me a slap; I give back two? No, my dear, Christ did not teach us fools such things. This is the way He taught us: If anyone slaps you, turn the other cheek and his conscience will prick him. Did Christ teach us wrong?

IVAN. But Gavriló insults me and then—I—I see red.

UNCLE FROL. You foolish fellow, get about your work, and if anyone insults you, forgive him in God's name and you will feel much easier. (*A pause.*) See here, Ivan, go back to court, say to the Judge that you forgive Gavriló and don't want him whipped. In the morning go to Gavriló, ask his forgiveness in God's name, ask him to the house, light the samovar, clear up all the trouble and tell your wife and children to do the same. (*A pause.*)

IVAN (*slowly nods*).

UNCLE FROL. Don't put it off. Put out the fire when it first begins. (*A pause.*)

IVAN (*slowly*). You're right, father, you're right. I'll— (*Rises.*)

IVANOVNA *rushes in with* OLD WOMAN.

IVANOVNA. Ai, Ivan, listen; Gavriilo's talking wild.

OLD WOMAN. He's threatening you, he is; yes, yes, he's threatening you. HE'S TALKIN' WILD! (*She keeps on muttering.*)

IVANOVNA. He says if he is whipped it shall cost you dear. He's going to petition the Tsar; the schoolmaster's writing the letter.

IVAN. Where did you hear all this?

OLD WOMAN. He's talkin' wild, he is, to the whole village. (*She moves away.*)

IVANOVNA. They're telling everyone they'll get half of our land away from us.

IVAN (*with growing anger*). What's that you say?

OLD WOMAN (*with a grin*). Eh! He's talkin' wild agin you. (*She hobbles out.*)

IVANOVNA. Ivan, what are you going to do?

IVAN. Enough! Enough! They're bad neighbors, bad neighbors, and the town should be rid of them.

UNCLE FROL. Ivan! Ivan!

IVANOVNA. Now don't you talk, father, when you know Gavriilo knocked me down and has threatened to set our house afire.

IVAN (*grimly*). He'd better not try; it'd mean Siberia for him—or hanging.

UNCLE FROL. O Vanya, Vanya—

IVAN. Come, old man, it's time you were abed. (*IVAN and IVANOVNA lead him out.*)

NATASHA, MARYA and ROSTOF *enter, playing tag*. SONIA and PETYA *enter from opposite side*. They march across stage elaborately sticking out their tongues. The other children respond in kind. They draw away. When SONIA and PETYA are nearly across, NATASHA points the finger of scorn.

NATASHA. Ai, prison-children! Prison-children!

ROSTOF. YOUR father'll be whipped! Your father'll be whipped!

ROSTOF and NATASHA and MARYA (*jumping up and down*). Your father'll be whipped!

PETYA. He won't either, you little beast. (*They fight.*)

NATASHA. Go it, Rostof! Lick him! Lick him!

SONIA. Hurray, Petya, punch him, punch him hard!

IVAN *enters*.

IVAN. Be off! Get out, all of you! (*The children scamper off. The sky darkens. He looks about him and at his house set back among trees.*) If he should try it! Everything's dry as powder. If he should try to set my house afire—I'll catch him, the dog! He ought to be killed. (*The sky darkens rapidly. IVAN crouches low in foreground. Silence. Then a dark figure crosses the background carrying a tiny light. He kneels beside IVAN'S house. IVAN springs forward, catches the man and half throttles him.*) Ai, you would, would you, you dog! You shan't escape! I'll choke the life out of you. (*A red light appears inside house. GAVRILO flees. IVAN catches him; they struggle. GAVRILO hits IVAN who falls. GAVRILO hides in back. IVAN cries as he falls.*) Catch him! Help! (*He becomes unconscious. The red light grows more and more vivid.*)

SONIA and PETYA run across stage towards IVAN'S house. They cry out.

SONIA and PETYA. Fire! Fire! Hurray! It's Ivan's house. Fire!

ROSTOF (*rushes in and meets CLERK and CONSTABLE*). Fire! Fire! (*He rushes back followed by CLERK.*)

CONSTABLE (*cries*). Get the hose! Hurry, men!

CRY FROM OUTSIDE. There's a leak! It's busted!

CONSTABLE (*bawls*). Buckets, then!

CRY FROM OUTSIDE. Form a line! Form a line!
(*Enter CLERK, JUDGE and a man with buckets; they pass them from one to another.*)

CONSTABLE (*cries*). Steady! Steady!

CRY OUTSIDE. Help! Help!

CONSTABLE (*calls*). What is it! What's up?

CRY OUTSIDE. Gavriło's house is afire! The wind, the wind! (*All run out.*)

IVAN (*rises dazedly and stares about him. Everything is afire*). What does it mean? Heavens and earth! A minute ago it was just a tiny spark—all it needed was to trample it with one foot—

ROSTOF (*dashes in*). Father, come! The whole village is burning. The wind carried the flames to Gavriło's house and everything's afire. Father, come! (*He runs back.*)

IVAN. What does it mean? It was just a tiny spark! I could have put it out with one hand, only I stopped to—I stopped to—what did I stop to do?

Several men enter from fire.

ONE MAN. It's all over. You can't do anything now; it's got such a start.

CONSTABLE. The whole village'll be gone by morning.

CLERK (*sees IVAN*). How did it happen? Ivan, how did it start? Where were you?

IVAN (*dazedly*). It was such a tiny spark—I could have put it out with one hand—only I—

MAN. He has lost his wits with grief.

Enter IVANOVNA.

IVANOVNA. Ivan, your father wants you. They got him out of the burning house, but he's dying all the same and calls for you.

IVAN. Whose father? Wants whom?

The CLERK and CONSTABLE go and return carrying
UNCLE FROL.

UNCLE FROL. Leave us. (*Everyone goes but IVAN.*)
Well, Vanyatka, who burned down the village?

IVAN (*suddenly seems to recover his wits*). Ah, I know, little father. 'Twas he, Gavriilo. Right before my eyes he touched off the roof. All I needed to do was to pluck out the bunch of burning straw, trample out the spark, and it would never have happened.

UNCLE FROL. Ivan, my death has come; you, too, will have to die. Whose sin was it? (*A pause.*) Tell me in God's presence whose sin was it? (*A pause.*)

IVAN (*falls on his knees*). Mine, father. Forgive me, father, I am guilty before you and before God.

UNCLE FROL. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
But, Vanya, Vanya—

IVAN. What is it, little father?

UNCLE FROL. What ought you to do now, Ivan?

IVAN. I don't know, little father. How are we going to live now, little father?

UNCLE FROL. You will get along. If you live with God you will get along. Look, Vanya, don't tell who started the fire. Hide—your—neighbor's—sin—and God—will—forgive—you—two—sins— (*UNCLE FROL dies.*)

GAVRILLO has been lurking in the background. Now he comes forward and puts out his hand with hesitation.

GAVRILO. You—won't—tell?

IVAN. No, neighbor! (*His hand goes out to meet GAVRILO'S.*)

CURTAIN.

EPILOGUE

A Russian dance by the united families of Ivan and Gavriilo.

KING ROBERT OF SICILY

FROM THE POEM

BY

LONGFELLOW

THE PEOPLE

KING ROBERT.
A MONK.
SEVERAL PEASANTS.
A CHILD.
A PAGE.
FIVE BEGGARS.
THE PRINCE.

THE PRINCESS.
SEVERAL CHILDREN.
POPE URBANE.
VALMOND, King of Alle-
maine.
TWO SOLDIERS.
COURTIERS AND LADIES.

THE PLACE

The throne-room of the King.



THE ANGEL AS KING



THE KING AND THE ANGEL



CHOIR-BOYS

KING ROBERT OF SICILY

At the back of the throne-room is a door leading to the chapel. The throne stands in front of the door a little to the left. In back and above the throne, if possible, have a stained glass window through which the lights of the chapel shine.

KING ROBERT *is seated on his throne; the MONK stands at his right. The SENTRIES guard the door to the right. The PEASANTS and the CHILD stand before the KING.*

THE KING (*yawns*). Clear the hall! Clear the hall!
I weary o' the judgment hour.

PEASANTS (*all speak together*).

O King, hear us! Hear us!

Justice, Lord King—

Lighten our taxes—

They have sold my child for a slave—

Justice! Have mercy.

THE KING (*stops his ears*). Bah! I cannot hear.
One of you speak and ha' done.

TALL PEASANT. O sire, thy people cry out by reason of thy cruelty—

THE KING. Swine! Cattle! Beware!

TALL PEASANT. Do thou beware!—for God hath trusted unto thee thy people. Lo, He shall judge thee!

THE KING (*furiously*). He—but not thou, fool!
For thou shalt hang merrily at dawn. Away with him—
yea, drive them all away!

The SENTRIES seize him; they prod the others with pikes; the TALL PEASANT breaks away and rushes to KING, who cowers on his throne.

TALL PEASANT (*raises his fist*). I will speak! Harken, O King, thou who sittest soft and despisest the poor, who hearest not the cry of thy people, behold God shall not hear thee! He shall cast thee down; thou shalt be for a mockery and a scorning!

The SENTRIES again seize him.

THE MONK. Take away the madman.

The SENTRIES drag him away with the others; the CHILD follows weeping.

THE KING (*palely*). He wrongs me; I love the poor. Did not the Master bless the poor, the meek? 'Tis but when they are proud and rise against their King I chasten them. I love the lowly.

THE MONK (*soothingly*). Yea, sire! And so thou wilt remember the holy custom this blessed Easter-tide?

THE KING (*irritably*). What! What!

THE MONK. Thou rememberest, sire, how our blessed Master washed his disciples' feet and bade us do likewise in memory of Him.

THE KING. Eh? Well?

THE MONK. The beggars are assembled in the courtyard, that thou mayest wash their feet.

THE KING (*distastefully*). Are they dirty?

THE MONK. Not so, sire! Their feet are cleansed first. It is but for a sign that thou hast compassion on the poor and on the needy.

THE KING. Humph!

THE MONK (*persuasively*). Thy royal brothers keep the custom, sire, both Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine, also thy holy brother, Pope Urbane.

THE KING. Well, let 'em be brought, let 'em be brought; I'll wash 'em. But dinner first, lest it destroy my appetite.

THE MONK. Your Majesty is wise.

The MONK escorts the KING to the back door; then he turns to the outer door on the right and calls—

Ho, are the beggars ready?

FIRST SENTRY (*without*). Aye, father.

The SENTRIES usher in five men in rags; each carries a stool.

THE MONK. Are their feet all washed?

SECOND SENTRY. Yea.

THE MONK (*points to one*). Thine are dirty; go wash again. (*Turns to SENTRY.*) Go, bid the Prince and Princess bring basin and ewer; I will assist the King.

The SENTRIES salute and go; the MONK follows; the BEGGARS place their stools in a semicircle on the right and seat themselves.

FIRST BEGGAR. This is new to me; what's it all for?

SECOND BEGGAR. The washing? Heaven only knows. Some foolishness!

FIRST BEGGAR. Must one submit?

THIRD BEGGAR. Well, in the old king's time they always gave you a good dinner to pay for it, cabbage and lentil soup—

FIRST BEGGAR. A good dinner, say you? (*He smacks his lips.*)

SECOND BEGGAR. Look you, brother, this King is new; suppose he forget the dinner so that we wash for naught?

FIRST BEGGAR (*a humorist*). Suggest it not; I would go drown myself. But what's it for?

Three BEGGARS slowly shrug.

FIFTH BEGGAR. It is in memory of our Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ.

FIRST BEGGAR. Eh?

FIFTH BEGGAR. In the gospel of John it is written: Jesus riseth from supper, took a towel and girded himself and began to wash his disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. And he said unto them: If I, your lord and master, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example.

There is a pause.

FIRST BEGGAR. Oh!

Enter the PAGE.

THE PAGE. Get up! Get up! His majesty arrives. Get up and cry: Long live his majesty, Robert the Good!

FOUR BEGGARS (*feebly*). Long live his majesty!

THE PAGE (*prompts*). Robert the Good.

FIRST BEGGAR. That word sticks in my throat.

THE PAGE (*pulls aside curtain at back and cries*). Way for the King! Way for the King! (*To BEGGARS.*) Now, ready—

THE BEGGARS. Long live his majesty, Robert the Good!

Enter the KING and MONK followed by the PRINCE and PRINCESS, who bear basin and ewer. The COURTIERs and COURT LADIES follow.

THE MONK (*to the BEGGARS*). Be seated. Suffer me, lord, to gird thee with this apron. (*He throws a white garment over the KING's head which completely conceals his robe. At the same time he deftly removes the KING's robe so that underneath the apron are only rags. He throws robe on throne.*) My lord Prince, pour out the water.

The PRINCE pours water from ewer into the basin which the PRINCESS holds; she places it before the first BEGGAR; the KING kneels and dabs at the BEGGAR's feet.

THE PRINCE (*before SECOND BEGGAR*). Ai! 'Twould need more than a teacup of water to cleanse his feet!

SECOND BEGGAR. 'Tis that I have walked a lifetime in the dust, little princeling.

THE PRINCE (*turns up his nose and goes to the next*). Ai! see, sister, this one hath a red nose. Hola, fellow, thou hast ne'er seen water before, is it not so? Thou likest wine better, yea!

THE KING. Hold thy peace.

THE PRINCE (*before FIFTH BEGGAR*). But, father, see! My lord the King, but behold! This beggar's cloak shines as the sun.

THE KING. Be still. (*He washes the last BEGGAR's feet.*) Now get ye gone.

FIRST BEGGAR (*hopefully*). To the feast, good King?

THE KING. Feast? Feast? What feast?

FOURTH BEGGAR. What are we washed for?

THE KING. Drive the beggars hence!

THE PRINCE (*gleefully*). Father, they think you are mean not to give them to eat for letting themselves be washed.

FOUR BEGGARS (*move toward KING with asking palms*). Yea, yea, give us a feast, O King.

THE KING (*furiously*). Away! Away!

The SENTRIES drive BEGGARS away. The FIFTH BEGGAR falls to the ground in the back. The SOLDIERS prod him with their pikes.

THE SOLDIERS. Up, up, old man!

THE PRINCESS. Nay, wait, the man is ill; he hath fallen down. (*She kneels beside him.*) Old man, old man, arise! Then let him rest a while and when he wakes, give him this coin wherewith to get him bread.

In the meantime the KING has mounted his throne and is resting with his eyes closed. The MONK addresses the COURTIERs and LADIES.

THE MONK. The King is indisposed. I pray you, gentles, get to the chapel yonder and pray all that God of his grace send healing. He is ill.

Music. Each COURTIER and LADY advances, bows and passes out, followed by the PRINCE and PRINCESS, the SENTRIES and PAGE.

The peasant CHILD enters timidly.

THE CHILD. O my lord, my lord the King—

THE KING (*rousing*). Who? What? How did you pass my guard?

THE CHILD. O my lord, you have said, my father, he should die tomorrow. O King, he is so good and kind—and he is all I have. You will not slay him—not on Easter morn?

THE KING. Shall I have no peace? Fling her into the gutter, where she belongs.

The MONK waves the CHILD away; she escapes him and flings herself before the KING.

THE CHILD. Mercy, O King!

THE KING. Begone! (*He strikes at her; she goes, weeping.*)

THE MONK. My son, that was not well done.

THE KING (*moodily*). My father, what do they sing yonder in the chapel? The words are in the Latin tongue. (*He listens to music of Magnificat, which is sung off stage.*)

THE MONK. They sing the chant of Mary which she sang to the Angel Gabriel.

THE KING. Say me the words.

THE MONK. They sing: "Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles," which means, my son, the Lord the God on high. He hath cast down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted them of low degree.

THE KING. Ha!

'Tis well that such seditious words are sung
Only by monks and in the Latin tongue.
He hath cast down the mighty—when—and how?
When were the mighty more secure than now?
One brother emperor is of Allemaine;
A pope my other brother, Pope Urbane.
I am secure; no power can cast me down.
Secure to me my wealth; secure my crown.

THE MONK. My son, thy words smack not of sweet humility.

THE KING.

Humility! A word for monks and beggars, not for me.
I'll have those words erased and bid the choir boy who
sings
Chant of the power and glory which belong to Sicily's
kings.

For unto priests and people be it known
There is no power can cast me from my throne.

He half rises, then sinks into his chair and waves the MONK away. He sleeps. The singing in the chapel goes on for a space, then dies away. Darkness. (During this darkness the KING must slip off his apron.) The lights from the chapel glow only against the background. Slowly the old BEGGAR rises from the ground; he drops his rags and stands revealed as an angel. He approaches the shadow where the KING sits, dons the KING's robe and crown, which the MONK had placed near the throne, and returns to the background, where he kneels praying. The singing begins again. Two CHOIR BOYS enter bearing lighted candles; they are followed by PRINCE and PRINCESS, COURTIERs and LADIES, MONK and SOLDIERs. All are singing the Magnificat.

THE KING (*wakes*). What means this?

MONK (*from the back*). Good my lord, we bring sweet music for thy healing.

Suddenly all perceive that it is a man clothed in rags who sits on throne. The CHOIR BOYS flee; the people scatter.

THE MONK. What ho! The king! Where is the king? Seize him! He's slain the king. (SENTRIES *seize the KING.*)

ALL. The King! The King!

THE KING. Fools, I am here. (*He struggles with SENTRIES.*)

THE ANGEL (*advances*). Attend! Be gentle with him. He hath lost his mother-wit and thinks himself a king.

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS (*run to ANGEL*). Father!

THE KING. But I *am* king. Thief, thou hast stolen my crown.

THE ANGEL (*to SENTRIES*). Take him away.

FIRST SENTRY. Come, cool thy wits in a dungeon. (*He drags at the KING.*)

THE KING (*wrenches himself away*). But I *am* king. (*To PRINCE*) Dost thou not know me, child?

THE PRINCE (*shrinks away*). Go away.

THE PRINCESS. I know who he is—the beggar who fell ill. Fellow, I pity thee.

THE KING. But I *am* King.

THE ANGEL.

Not the king but the king's jester thou!
Henceforth shalt wear the bells and scalloped cape,
And for thy counsellor shalt lead an ape;
Thou shalt obey my servants when they call,
And wait upon my henchmen in the hall.

FIRST COURTIER (*advances with low bow*). A king in motley!

FIRST LADY (*advances with courtesy*). Hail, my lord the King!

SECOND COURTIER. Hail, lord, hail!

SECOND LADY (*runs forward mockingly*). Lord, thy velvet robe is spattered with mire.

THIRD LADY (*points with derision*). Lord, there is a rent within thy royal hosen, lord.

All laugh as the soldiers drag at the KING.

THE KING (*furiously*). Ah, ye shall suffer, suffer all! This is a plot, a black conspiracy to take away my kingship. My brothers will hear my cry and come from far— (*His voice changes and becomes almost bewildered.*) Do ye not see that I am King?

THE ANGEL (*sternly*). Did I not see more fool than knave in thee, then would I give command to clap thee in the deepest dungeon that thy sin should no more black the world, O thou, beggared of love, beggared of kindness, beggared of pity! But, since I see thee in the light of God, I plant in thy darkness a seed; I await its growth and bloom;

For from a darksome tomb that Easter morn
The light o' the world was born.

ACT II—The same scene, many months later.

The KING, dressed as a jester, is seated in deep dejection at the foot of the throne. The SENTRIES at the door are baiting him.

FIRST SENTRY (*leans forward waggishly*). Come, fool, come caper for us. (*Prods him with pike.*) Come, come, come!

THE KING (*jerks away, then looks up sullenly*). Let me alone!

SECOND SENTRY (*at door, to FIRST*). Tickle his rib with thy spear and make him dance.

Dance music without. The SENTRIES stand at attention. The COURTIERS and LADIES enter dancing a merry dance; as it ends one notices the KING.

FIRST LADY. Why, here's our merry man! Come, dance a pace! (*Offers her hand.*)

SECOND LADY. Why be so glum? Come, dance; I'll teach thee.

THIRD LADY (*grimacing*). Choose me! I am the fairest.

THE KING. Bah! Away!

FIRST COURTIER (*pricks KING with sword*). Thou churlish clown! Dance when the lady bids.

ALL. Come, Jester, dance. A ring! A ring! A ring! (*Laughing merrily, they force him into center of the circle.*)

THE KING.

Begone!

Ye have robbed me of a kingdom; will ye also mock me with a fool's cap and bells?

Think ye I wear these patiently? Though I obey, Each hour adds to my debt, and I will surely pay. My brothers will avenge me.

FIRST LADY. Who are they?

SECOND LADY. Who be these wondrous men, thy brothers twain?

THE KING. Urbane, the Pope, and Valmond of All'maine.

All laugh.

FIRST COURTIER.

Did'st thou not know we go with song and glee To welcome two great men to Sicily?

THE KING (*eagerly*). My brothers?

FIRST COURTIER (*slowly and smilingly shakes his head*). Brothers of the King, by name—

FIRST LADY. Curious!

SECOND LADY. Astounding!

THIRD LADY. Marvelous!

FIRST COURTIER. Valmond the emperor and Pope Urbane.

THE KING (*with a cry of triumph*). Ah, they have come to give me back my throne.

SECOND COURTIER.

Friend, you grow tedious. (*To others.*) Leave the fool alone.

Come, let us forth. Let one the garlands bring
To welcome the two brothers of the king.

Music. They go out dancing. The KING seeks to follow them out, right. The SENTRIES drop their pikes.

THE KING. Let me forth! Let me forth!

FIRST SENTRY (*dubiously scratches his head*). Best not! Best not! The King would not be pleased.

SECOND SENTRY. Let the King greet his brethren in peace, free from thy plaguing. Why he bears with thee is more than I can see.

THE KING (*commandingly*). Let me forth!

FIRST SENTRY. Bide here. The King gives audience anon. Then thou mayest step forth and say: Most noble emperor, thou mayest say, like this: Behold thy brother. (*With a mocking laugh*) He, he, he!

SECOND SENTRY. A fine surprise 'twill give him.

FIRST SENTRY. Or, thou mayest stand before the pope and clap thy arms about his neck and cry: Be brother to a fool. Ha, ha, ha, ha! (*With arms outstretched he seeks to embrace the KING.*)

THE KING (*quietly*). Will ye not let me pass?

BOTH SENTRIES (*annoyed that their wit does not amuse him*). NO!

The KING resumes his seat at foot of throne. The PRINCE and PRINCESS run in playing a game followed by other CHILDREN. They toss colored balls.

FIRST CHILD. Oh, here's the jester; he shall tell us a tale.

SECOND CHILD. Tell us a merry tale about the time thou wert a king.

ALL THE CHILDREN (*press about him*). Yea! Yea!

THE KING. I will not.

THE PRINCE (*drawing himself up proudly*). Not when *I* command? I am the son of the King.

THE KING. So, art thou? And still I will not.

THE PRINCESS (*touches his arm gently*). Ah, dear jester, please.

THE KING (*puts his arm about her*).

Yea, sweetheart, yea, to thee I'll tell a tale. (*All gather round.*)

Once was a king's son, O most monstrous fine!
He went in lace and velvet. One dark day
Traitors took off his festive high array
And sent him forth to tend the geese and swine.
When the king's son is grown what shall he do?

THE PRINCE (*hotly*). Clap them in dungeons!

ANOTHER CHILD. Chop their heads off, too!

THE FIRST CHILD. Here is an orange, jester, for thy fee. (*Tosses an orange.*)

THE KING (*rising*).

Ah, when I rule again in Sicily
My enemies shall groan and cry aloud.
I shall put down the mighty and the proud,
And shall exalt the—ah, what do I say?

CHILDREN (*laughing and clapping*). Go on, go on, oh fine!

THE PRINCESS.

O jester, nay!

Prithee take not away my father's crown.
Lo, he is mighty; do not cast him down.

THE PRINCE. Silly! He could not. 'Twas a jest.
Don't grieve.

THE PRINCESS (*wiping her eyes*).

Men say an angel came last Easter eve
And wrestled with the King. It all befell
Just as with Jacob, Prince of Israel.
And since that time people with one accord
Say that his reign is blessed of the Lord.

The ANGEL enters slowly from rear. He is robed as KING.

THE KING. Blest of the devil!

THE PRINCE (*drawing his sword*). Jester, for that word, I'll punish thee. (*He strikes at KING. The KING twists his sword away.*)

THE PRINCESS (*runs to ANGEL*). Oh father, thou hast heard? Say that he shall not hurt thee?

THE ANGEL (*smiles*). Be content.
He can hurt no one; this, his punishment.

The CHILDREN all courtesy as the ANGEL advances.

THE KING. Have I no power to avenge me?

THE ANGEL. None!
Powerless thou, and friendless—save for One—

THE KING. One? Who?

THE ANGEL. Almighty God.

THE KING.

Who hath cast me down
From the seat o' the mighty, who hath given my crown
To a beggar! Shall I humbly bow the knee
And thank God for His grace and clemency?
Not I!

The PAGE runs in.

THE PAGE.

O lord the King, thy brothers twain,
Valmond the emperor and Pope Urbane.

THE KING (*exults*).

I had forgot. My brothers will defend.
Not powerless, friendless I, with them for friend.
Let me go forth to them—unless thou fear. (*He seeks to pass SENTRIES; they drop their pikes.*)

THE ANGEL. Nay, if thou seekest justice, seek it here.

THE KING *turns and retires by back way to chapel.*
Music. Enter the COURTIERs and LADIES and form two
lines leading to throne on which the ANGEL is seated.
Enter the POPE and EMPEROR.

ALL (*cry*).

All hail the holy Father, Pope Urbane!
 All hail to Valmond, Lord of Allemaine!

The ANGEL descends from dais and grasps each by hand.

THE ANGEL.

Urbane, and Valmond, welcome, welcome be.

POPE URBANE.

The Lord be with you, brother of Sicily!

VALMOND.

We looked for you to greet us on the way.
 What pleasure kept thee?

THE ANGEL. This my judgment day.

VALMOND.

Hear words of wonder!

Almost I could believe
 The tale men tell of how last Easter Eve
 Thou wrestled with an angel—and *he* won.

THE ANGEL (*smiles*). My day is over with the setting sun. (*The light grows dimmer. Loud knocking from chapel.*) Yet one more craveth justice. (*To SENTRY*) See who knocks?

SENTRY *goes back. A voice is heard crying: I WILL enter.*

THE ANGEL. Admit him.

The SOLDIER stands aside. The KING enters. Over his jester's robe he wears a shepherd's cloak and cap. He stands before the ANGEL.

THE KING (*arrogantly*).

I am a shepherd, and my flocks—
 A robber stole them; into the fold he crept

And stole my sheep while I, the shepherd, slept.
Is justice for the strong and not the weak?
You prate of justice.

Justice it is I seek.

THE ANGEL. Then—name the robber.

THE KING.

He sits throned on high.

Thou art the robber and the King am I. (*He throws off shepherd's cap, revealing jester's cap beneath. He turns to his brothers.*)

I am the king. Look and behold in me
Robert, your brother, King of Sicily.
This man who wears my semblance to your eyes
Is an impostor in a king's disguise.
Do you not know me? Does no voice within
Answer my cry and say we are akin?

VALMOND (*to ANGEL*).

Who is this, brother? Sure it is strange sport
To keep a madman for thy fool at court.

THE ANGEL.

Look on him well; he claims to be the king.

VALMOND (*contemptuously shrugs*).

A whipping were as good as anything.

THE KING (*to VALMOND*). Do you deny me?

VALMOND (*to ANGEL*). Brother, is this a play?

THE KING (*to URBANE*). Do you deny me, Urbane?

POPE URBANE. Fool, away. (*Waves him off.*)

The KING mechanically removes his jester's cap, as one dazed.

POPE URBANE.

Come, brothers, to the church which is near by
And praise our God who hath joined us once again.

VALMOND (*carelessly*).

As to yon madman, hang the fellow high.
So I advise thee, Robert.

POPE URBANE. Yea, amen!

THE ANGEL (*to POPE and EMPEROR*).
Go, go and pray to God that He may be
More pitiful than ye.
In a short while shall join you
Robert of Sicily.

Music. The POPE and EMPEROR pass to chapel followed by all but the ANGEL and the KING. The lights are lighted in the chapel, from which a chant is faintly heard. It grows gradually darker in the throne-room. The KING, utterly despairing, stands gazing out into the night. The ANGEL remains standing on the dais. Finally the KING turns and stands dejectedly before the ANGEL. He speaks imploringly.

THE KING.
Thou hast conquered. Of thy mercy let me go.

THE ANGEL.
Mercy? What mercy didst thou ever show?

THE KING.
In common justice let me then depart.

THE ANGEL.
Justice hath been a stranger to thine heart.
No surer law to all mankind is known
Than this: Each man shall reap what he hath sown.

THE KING.
Yet art thou just.
I hate thee, yet I know
Thou hast brought back—so all men say of thee—
The golden days of old to Sicily.
Have mercy then on me—and let me go.

THE ANGEL (*sternly*). Art thou the King?

THE KING.
No king. A jester, I!
The plaything of the God that sits on high.

THE ANGEL (*more gently*).
No plaything thou! The Lord to thee hath done
Even as a father to his beloved son.

THE KING (*kneels*).

Thou knowest best.

O sir, let me go hence.

Scarlet my sins are; great my penitence!

THE ANGEL.

Art thou so humble? God exalts thee then.

For He puts down the mighty from their seat,

And raiseth up the humble.

Be again

The King. (*He takes off velvet robe and throws it over KING.*)

THE KING.

Who art thou?

Only *thou* hast shown

Pity and kindness, thou, thou alone!

Who art thou? Who but God could do this thing?

Who art thou? For my sins I will atone.

THE ANGEL (*placing crown on KING's head*).

I am an angel; and thou art the King.

The ANGEL raises his wings and passes to back where his wings catch the light from the chapel. He disappears.

THE END

YUSSOUF

FROM THE POEM

BY

LOWELL

THE PEOPLE

YUSSOUF.

ATTENDANT.

IBRAHIM.

MESSENGER.

WOMEN.

THE PLACE

The desert sands outside the tent of Yussouf.

SCENE I—Late sunset.

SCENE II—Early sunrise.



A DANCING WOMAN

YUSSOUF

The scene consists of a striped tent, erected against a deep blue background.

YUSSOUF is clad in a white robe with long full sleeves. On his head he wears a turban, over which is thrown a mantle reaching nearly to the ground.

IBRAHIM is robed likewise save that his gown is shorter and is girdled. He wears a sword.

The ATTENDANT and the MESSENGER are clad in plainer garments, but of the same nature.

The WOMEN are robed in loose, baggy trousers, hanging from the shoulders; they wear light flowing veils.

The stage is flooded with sunset light.

At the door of the tent stands the ATTENDANT, armed.

SCENE I

The MESSENGER enters in great haste.

MESSENGER.

Where is the tent of Yussouf? Take me there.
For sad and mournful is the news I bear.
Now let the women wail the fallen one,
For the chief, Yussouf, he hath lost his son.

ATTENDANT.

Woe, woe to Yussouf!

Messenger of ill,

Enter thou in. (*He draws aside the flap of the tent.*)

Now let the women fill

The air with lamentations.

The WOMEN creep in fearfully.

WOMEN.

What doth chance?

MESSENGER.

The chieftain's son is slain by traitor's lance.

While they are speaking YUSSOUF appears in door of tent.

WOMEN (*wail*). Ai! Ai! Ai! Ah—

YUSSOUF (*raises hand to WOMEN*).

Be ye still.

And tell me, O thou messenger of ill,
Who was it slew my son? For I will take
Vengeance upon him for my dear son's sake.

MESSENGER.

It was a man named "Ibrahim," my lord.

YUSSOUF.

He is unknown to me. But take my sword (*Unbuckles sword*.)

And seek him far and wide, and let him feel
My vengeance in thy swift descending steel.

MESSENGER (*takes sword*).

It shall be done. (*He bows low and goes.*)

YUSSOUF (*to ATTENDANT*).

Moreover, far and wide,
Let it be known that Ibrahim is denied
Both food and shelter, whatsoe'er the bribe.
Take my command to every desert tribe.

ATTENDANT.

It shall be done. (*He bows low and goes.*)

WOMEN (*wail*).

Woe to the fallen one!

Woe to our chief for he hath lost his son! (*They turn to go.*)

YUSSOUF (*points*).

Who is it rides so fast through desert sands?

FIRST WOMAN.

Lo, men are come to take my lord's commands.

YUSSOUF.

It is but one man and he rides him fast.
O my dear son, if it were thou—at last!

SECOND WOMAN.

It is a stranger and he is sore sped;
He seeketh for a place to lay his head.

Enter the STRANGER.

THE STRANGER.

Tell me, ye women, is this Yussouf's tent?

WOMEN.

It is.

THE STRANGER (*bows to YUSSOUF*).

Behold one outcast and in dread,
Against whose life the bow of power is bent,
Who flees and hath not where to lay his head.
I come to thee for shelter and for food,
To Yussouf, called through all our tribes "the good."

YUSSOUF (*holding back curtain*).

The tent is mine, O stranger, but no more
Than it is God's. Come in and be at peace.
Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,
As I of His, who planteth over these,
Our tents, His glorious roof of night and day,
And at whose door none ever yet heard "Nay."

YUSSOUF and IBRAHIM go within.

WOMEN (*wail*).

Woe, woe to Yussouf for the fallen one!
Woe to our chief for he hath lost his son!

They dance slowly and mournfully, then sink to earth in silence. During the dance the sky slowly darkens. The curtain descends to mark the hours of the night.

SCENE II

The curtain rises. The sky is still dark, but a faint red glimmer of dawn creeps over the sky which gradually lightens. The WOMEN stir.

FIRST WOMAN (*rises slowly*).
The morning sun maketh the desert flame.

SECOND WOMAN.
Pray we to God. Praise to his holy name!

YUSSOUF and the STRANGER emerge from tent. All stand facing the sun.

ALL PRAY.
La illaha il Allah Mahamoud rousol il Allah.
God is good. Whatever of good betideth thee cometh
from Him;
Whatever of evil is thine own doing.

YUSSOUF.
Now thou must haste thee, stranger. Here is gold.
My swiftest horse is saddled for thy flight.
Depart before the prying day grow bold.

STRANGER.
I thank thee, Yussouf, for thy care this night.
As one lamp lights another nor grows less,
So, chief, thy nature kindleth nobleness. (*He kneels
before YUSSOUF.*)

WOMEN.
See how the stranger bows him very low.

STRANGER.
Yussouf the Good, I cannot leave thee so. (*He seizes
YUSSOUF's hand.*)
I will repay thee. All this thou hast done
Unto that Ibrahim who slew thy son.

WOMEN (*furiously*).
Take vengeance, vengeance for the fallen one.
Avenge thee, chief. Slay him who slew thy son.

Slowly IBRAHIM unbuckles and gives his sword into
YUSSOUF's hands. YUSSOUF hesitates, then refuses it.
He takes gold from his coffer and pours it into IBRAHIM's
hands.

YUSSOUF.

Take thrice the gold, O Ibrahim, for with thee
Into the desert never to return
My one black thought shall ride away from me.

IBRAHIM *goes with slow step and hanging head.*

YUSSOUF (*stretching out his arms to heaven*).
First-born, for whom by day and night I yearn,
Balanced and just are all of God's decrees.
Thou art avenged, my first-born.
Sleep in peace.

THE END



THE LIFE BEYOND

FROM THE STORY

BY

MRS. GATTY



THE PEOPLE

HONORED FROG.
THE OLDEST GRUB.
THE TRUSTING GRUB.
THE INQUISITIVE GRUB.
THE GRUB WHO SCOFFS.

THE GRUB WHO DOUBTS.
THE GRUB WHO HOPES.
THE TORTOISE.
TADPOLES.

THE PLACE

There should be an upper and under stage. If a platform is built for the upper stage there should be a hole in it at one side large enough to admit the body of a child. A board should be cut with alternate steps on each side, and painted to represent the stalk of a plant. This should be tall enough to reach from the lower stage up through the hole, as on this the GRUBS climb to the upper air. A blue curtain should be hung at back and sides. On the upper stage branches of trees or palms may be arranged to represent the border of a pond.

Between the lower stage and the audience have one thickness of thin green tarlatan. Toward the back of the lower stage have one or two curtains of tarlatan, yellow or green or blue.

Throw the light from the sides through the waters.

THE LIFE BEYOND

The little GRUBS, the TADPOLES and the TORTOISE enter and swim about, catching hold of one another's tails. The FROG jumps in and out again.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Hi, brothers, what can become of the frog when he climbs up out of this world and disappears, till—plop! he is among us again? Does anybody know where he goes? Tell me, somebody, pray.

SCOFFING GRUB. Who cares what the frog does? What is it to us?

TORTOISE. Look out for food for yourself and let other people's business alone.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Ai! but I have a curiosity on the subject. I can see you all, all the time, but I followed the frog just now as he went upward, and all at once he began to disappear, and presently he was gone. Did he leave the world, do you think, and what can there be beyond?

TORTOISE. You idle, talkative fellow, attend to the world you are in and leave the "beyond," if there is a "beyond," to those who are there. See what a morsel you have missed with your wonderings about nothing! (*He chases a TADPOLE.*)

The FROG jumps in.

SCOFFING GRUB. There's the frog himself! Ask him.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. But I am afraid; he might think me saucy. Nevertheless, I will venture to speak. (*To FROG, timidly.*) Is it permitted to a very unhappy creature to speak?

HONORED FROG. Very unhappy creatures had better be silent. I never talk but when I am happy.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. But I shall be happy if I may talk.

HONORED FROG. Talk away then. What can it matter to me?

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Respected Frog, but it is something I want to ask you.

HONORED FROG. Ask away.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Wh-wh-what is there beyond the world?

HONORED FROG. Humph! What world do you mean?

INQUISITIVE GRUB. This world, of course; our world!

HONORED FROG. This pond, you mean?

INQUISITIVE GRUB. I mean the place we live in, whatever *you* may choose to call it. *I* call it the world.

HONORED FROG (*chuckles*). Do you, sharp little fellow? Then what is the place you don't live in, the "beyond the world," eh?

INQUISITIVE GRUB. That is just what I want *you* to tell *me*.

HONORED FROG. Oh, indeed, little one. Come, I shall tell you then: It is dry land. (*There is a pause.*)

INQUISITIVE GRUB (*in a meek voice*). Can one swim about there?

HONORED FROG. I should think not! Dry land is not water, little fellow; that is just what it is not.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. But I want you to tell me what it is.

HONORED FROG. Of all the inquisitive creatures I ever met, you certainly are the most troublesome. Well then, dry land is something like the mud at the bottom of the pond, only it is not wet because there is no water.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Really? What is there then?

HONORED FROG. That's the difficulty. There is something, of course, and they call it "air"; but how to explain it, I don't know. My own feeling about it is that air is the nearest approach to nothing possible. Do you comprehend?

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Not quite!

HONORED FROG. Exactly! I was afraid not. Now just take my advice and ask no more silly questions. No good can possibly come of it.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Honored Frog, I must differ from you there. Great good will come of it if I learn to be contented where I am. At present I am miserable in my ignorance.

HONORED FROG. You are a very silly fellow. However, I rather admire your spirit, which is like my own. For so insignificant a creature it is quite astonishing. Come, I will make you an offer. If you care to take a seat on my back, I will carry you up to dry land, and you can judge for yourself. I consider it a foolish experiment, mind, but I make my offer to give you pleasure.

INQUISITIVE GRUB (*enthusiastically*). And I accept it with a gratitude that knows no bounds.

HONORED FROG. Drop yourself on my back then. (*The GRUB mounts.*) Hold fast. (*The FROG makes one jump and the GRUB falls off. FROG jumps and appears on upper stage.*) Now then, here we are! What do you think of dry land? Hello? Gone? That's just what I was afraid of. Stupid fellow, I declare! Dear, dear, how unlucky! But it cannot be helped.

The FROG jumps about among trees or palms. The INQUISITIVE GRUB begins to recover. The other GRUBS jeer at him.

SCOFFING GRUB. I told you so; it served you right!

DOUBTING GRUB. You were a very foolish fellow.

HOPEFUL GRUB. Tell me, what did it feel like? Did it hurt you?

The FROG jumps back.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Hurt me? Oh, it was terrible beyond everything. (*He sees FROG.*) You here! You never left the world at all then. How you deceived me! But this comes of trusting to strangers.

HONORED FROG (*gravely*). You perplex me by your offensive remarks. Nevertheless, I forgive you because civility cannot reasonably be expected from such a little fellow. It never struck you, I suppose, to think what my sensations were when I landed on the grass and found you gone. Why did you not sit fast? But that is always the way with you foolish fellows. You are dismayed by the first practical difficulty you meet.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Your accusations are full of injustice. I held on tight; but as we began to leave the water something horrible struck me right here. I fell back panting for breath. It was death to have held on. It is clear to me that there is nothing beyond this world but death. Your stories are mere inventions. I have no wish to be fooled by any more traveler's tales, so I will bid you a very good evening. (*Turns haughtily away.*)

HONORED FROG. You will do no such thing till you have listened as patiently to my story as I have to yours.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. That is but just, I allow.

HONORED FROG. I meant well by you; was it my fault that the upper air meant death to you? I waited for you by the water's edge, and at last, though I did not see you, I saw a sight that has more interest for you than for any other living creature.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. And that was—?

HONORED FROG. Up the green stalk of a bulrush I saw a grub like you slowly climbing. He left the water, and presently—I cannot tell you exactly how—a rent seemed to come in his body and his outer skin fell off, and there emerged one of those radiant creatures who

float through the air and dazzle the eyes of all, a glorious dragon-fly. I gazed and saw the four gauzy wings flash back the sunshine; I saw his body give out glittering rays of blue and green as he darted now hither, now thither over the water. Then I plunged below to seek you out, rejoicing for your sake in the news I brought.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. It is a wonderful story.

HONORED FROG. A wonderful story, indeed! May I ask your opinion upon it.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. It is for me to defer mine to yours.

HONORED FROG. Good! You are grown obliging, little fellow. Well, then, I think that what I have seen explains your otherwise unreasonable curiosity, about the world beyond your own.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. That were possible—always provided your account can be depended upon. (*The other GRUBS all nod.*)

HONORED FROG. Little fellow, remember your distrust cannot injure me, but may deprive yourself of a comfort.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. And you really think, then, that the glorious creature you describe was once a—

HONORED FROG. Silence! I am not prepared with definitions. Go to rest, little fellow, and awake in hope. (*The FROG jumps out.*)

INQUISITIVE GRUB (*to others*). You all heard what he said. What do you think?

SCOFFING GRUB. It is contrary to reason.

DOUBTING GRUB. Be not deceived; no one has ever come back to tell us of a life beyond.

HOPEFUL GRUB. It may be. It is a beautiful thought.

THE OLDEST GRUB. I know not, brothers, if his story be the truth or no. I wish I did, for I am suffocated by this heavy water. I feel I must move upward, upward to the light. I feel I am departing this glad life.

HOPEFUL GRUB. Then promise us if these glad hopes prove true, and if there be indeed a life beyond, you will return and tell us.

OLDEST GRUB. I promise.

HOPEFUL GRUB. Faithfully?

OLDEST GRUB. Solemnly.

DOUBTING GRUB. But oh, if you should forget?

OLDEST GRUB. Forget the old home, my friends! Impossible!

DOUBTING GRUB. But if you should be unable to come back to us?

OLDEST GRUB. More unlikely still! To a condition so exalted as the one in store for us, what can be impossible? Farewell. (*She mounts stalk.*) I will return in a more glorious form.

ALL THE GRUBS (*clustering about stalk*). Farewell.

While the GRUBS cluster about stalk they drag away the outer robe of the GRUB as deftly as may be; so as the GRUB emerges on the upper stage her green tunic is gone and she appears robed in dragon-fly blue. Her wings which were concealed in the green tunic fall loose, and with her finger tips she spreads them wide. Screening makes excellent wings for this purpose.

SCOFFING GRUB. Can you see her?

DOUBTING GRUB. No.

HOPEFUL GRUB (*to TORTOISE*). Go up and see if there be yet a trace of her.

TORTOISE (*climbs part way up stalk*). I can see nothing.

SCOFFING GRUB. It is a lie; there is no life beyond.

In the meantime the OLDEST GRUB has tried her wings: now she darts hither and thither over the pond. Nevin's dragon-fly music.

OLDEST GRUB (*now OLDEST DRAGON-FLY*). It is true! It is true! Ah, I had forgot my promise. No more shall my dear brothers fear. How dark and cold the water is! Must I go back? And yet—if I can make them glad—here goes! (*She dives, but recoils quickly.*) Ah, horrible! The water bruises my fair wings. Oh, the air! The blessed air! I cannot leave it. (*Bends over pool.*) Oh, little Grubs, come near, and I will tell you of the life beyond. (*Pause.*) Alas, they will think me false. (*She flutters slowly and unobtrusively about back of stage.*)

SCOFFING GRUB. She is faithless!

DOUBTING GRUB. A death from which she never can awake has overtaken her.

TRUSTING GRUB. We must not despair, but oh, my friends, I trusted my sister as I would myself. She has not returned, but I feel that I am going to her, either to a new life or to a death from which there is no return. Dear ones, I go as she did, upward, upward. Should our great hopes prove true, we will return. If I return not—but rely on me. My word is more to me than life. Farewell. (*She mounts stalk. Other GRUBS, same action as before.*)

SCOFFING GRUB. She is fooled even as her sister.

HOPEFUL GRUB. Wait. (*They wait.*)

Dragon-fly music. The TRUSTING GRUB spreads her wings.

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY. Hail, sister! Welcome to the glorious life of a bright dragon-fly.

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY (*amazed*). You here!

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY. Do you not know me?

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY (*indignantly*). Ah, false one! While we feared and hoped below, you sported here on gauzy wing, forgetful of our misery. There are those waiting far below who loved you. Why, oh why, did you not hasten back to calm our fears?

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY (*humbly*). Sister, I tried.

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY. Peace, for I will not listen. Brothers, I come. (*She dives, but quickly recoils.*) Help! Help! Oh, save me, sister!

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY (*pulls her from water*). Thou foolish one! I tried, even as you, and failed.

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY (*shivering*). Ah, the horrible cold water! Why can we not return? Alas for the promises made in ignorance and presumption, miserable grubs that we were.

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY. We may not return, but we may hover near and welcome those who like ourselves rise upwards to the light.

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY. They will be glad to find us waiting here. Let us never flutter far away. (*Both flutter quietly about.*)

DOUBTING GRUB. She forgets us, even as her sister.

SCOFFING GRUB. The story of the other world is false, I tell you.

INQUISITIVE GRUB. Look at my eyes. They feel swelled and bursting. It is with me as with my sisters ere they left us. I must go upward—upward. Listen to me: Let the other world be what it will, glorious beyond belief, do not fear my love for you can change. I dare not promise more, yet, *if it be possible*, I will return. But remember, there may well be that other world, and yet we, in ours, may misjudge its nature. Farewell. Never part with hope; with your fears I know you never can part now.

ALL THE GRUBS. Farewell. (*They accompany him to stalk. Same action as before.*)

The remaining GRUBS wait a while, then swim slowly and mournfully about, or chase the TADPOLES.

The INQUISITIVE GRUB shakes out his wings and becomes the INQUISITIVE DRAGON-FLY. The other DRAGON-FLIES surround him. Music.



HONORED FROG AND THE DRAGON-FLIES

INQUISITIVE DRAGON-FLY. Can this be me? The little ugly grub? Wonderful! Wonderful! Oh, joy! Sisters, make haste! Those below await us. Come back with me to tell them.

OTHER DRAGON-FLIES. Brother, we cannot return.

INQUISITIVE DRAGON-FLY. Why not?

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY. I know not, but there is still a power over us we must obey. Do you remember, brother, how as grub you shrank from this pure air? Even so, as glorious dragon-flies we may not endure the water.

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY. To the life of the pool we can nevermore return.

The FROG jumps in.

INQUISITIVE DRAGON-FLY. But why this needless fear to those below? O honored frog, go you to those below and bear our messages of hope.

HONORED FROG. What use? I told you. Did you believe? (*The DRAGON-FLIES hang their heads.*) And if I tell you, furthermore, the time will come when you, your bodies and fair glistening wings, are dust, that you will still live on in some more glorious shape, in some more glorious world, will ye believe?

OLDEST DRAGON-FLY. How could there be another world than this?

HONORED FROG. Humph!

TRUSTING DRAGON-FLY. While in the pond—we thought the pond the world.

INQUISITIVE DRAGON-FLY. It may be. Everything's so wonderful.

THE END.

THE RING OF MAGIC POWER

ADAPTED FROM A LEGEND

BY

LESSING



THE PEOPLE

KING OF ELFLAND.	HIS GRANDCHILD.	
HAWK	THE THIEF.	
JAY	THE PRINCESS OF FAIRY-	
ROBIN	LAND.	
HIS FOOL.	MARIGOLD	} Her Maids.
HIS JEWELLER.	HEATHERBELLE	
ONE OR THREE WISE MEN.	HONEY-DEW	
A PAGE.	BUTTERCUP	
THE BEGGAR.		

The SONS may carry the KING's litter in the last act or there may be two LITTER-BEARERS.

THE PLACE

ACT I—The King's palace or garden.

ACT II—SCENE 1—The highway.

SCENE 2—The court of the Princess.

SCENE 3—The King's palace.

ACT III—The King's garden.

If given out of doors the same scene will do for all.

Toadstools for seats may be made of inverted chopping bowls nailed to round stakes which are fastened to ground. For the highway scene have a sign-post marked "To Fairyland" and "To Elfland."

THE RING OF MAGIC POWER

PROLOGUE

A FAIRY and the FOOL dance to the front of the stage; they tell the Prologue in turns; each emphasizes his part with the digit finger of the outer hand and rests weight upon the outer foot.

JESTER.

Once there lived a king of old—

FAIRY.

And he had a ring of gold—

They seize hands and dance in a circle, shouting the following:

Hey ho, nonny no!

Hey ho, nonny no!

They resume former positions.

JESTER.

And the ring upon his hand—

FAIRY.

Made him loved throughout the land—

They seize hands and dance again shouting:

Hey ho, nonny no!

Hey ho, nonny no!

They resume first positions.

JESTER.

And he gave it to his son,
To his dear and only one,
Saying, "When thy sands are run,

O my dear—

FAIRY.

O my dear—

Leave the ring as I have done

To thy most obedient son,

Sans a fear—

JESTER.

Sans a fear.

BOTH (*join hands and speak together*).

Let, by virtue of the ring,

The *obedient* son be king. (*They resume first position.*)

JESTER.

So it passed

To the father of three sons,

FAIRY.

All *obedient, loving* ones,

At the last.

Both raise arms helplessly.

JESTER.

What shall this poor father do?

FAIRY.

Choose the one? Reject the two?

BOTH (*make signs of grief*).

Melancholy!

JESTER (*more lightly*).

Answer, when this play is through—

FAIRY.

Does *his* way seem wise to you?

BOTH (*seize hands and dance, shouting*).

Wise? or *Folly*? (*They dance off.*)

ACT I

HAWK, JAY and ROBIN, the three sons of the KING, enter from different directions. All are prinking. One is dusting his hat, another his shoe, a third is adjusting his doublet.



PRINCE HAWK, PRINCE DAY, PRINCE ROBIN

ALL (*in surprise as they see one another*). Ho, whither away?

HAWK.
To the realm of faery,
To wed the Princess Most Contrary.

JAY.
But I am going to wed her, too.

HAWK (*smiles*). And thou, Cock Robin?

ROBIN.
I go to see
If I like her and if she like me.

HAWK (*proudly*).
Sure, she'd choose me rather than you,
For I am the eldest son of the King.

JAY.
But I, my lads, I am heir to the ring.

ROBIN. The ring!

HAWK. Thou liar! I am the heir. Swallow thy words. (*He attacks JAY; they roll on the ground.*)

The KING enters slowly, assisted by the FOOL.

THE KING (*sternly*). Forbear! Forbear!

THE FOOL.
O leave your foolery to me;
Steal not my trade. (*To the KING*) Give me thy ring,
And these shall be my fools a-capering.

THE KING (*to his SONS*).
Not one of ye the magic ring deserve.
He who would rule, O let him learn to serve.

HAWK (*dusting himself*). Have we not served thee?

THE KING.
Ye have served the *ring*
By virtue of which alone I am the king.
By virtue of my ring ye would ascend
This throne of Elfinland, and wear my crown,

When I am dust, and rule.

But mark ye well,

As the ring came to my fathers from of old

And as it came to me, I pass it on,

To my most obedient, most beloved son.

HAWK.

But sir, thy ring, it hath the magic power

To make him who possesses it, beloved

By God and man.

Is it so sinful then

To wish to be beloved by Gods and men?

THE KING (*trembling with anger*).

Beloved! Ye think not of it. Ye are fools!

Be off! But mark ye, who his spirit schools,

Is mightier far than who a kingdom rules.

HAWK (*smiles*). Do not excite thee, father.

JAY (*with solicitude*). Rest thee, so!

ROBIN (*anxiously*). Let me call thy physician.

THE KING (*waving them away*). Go! Go! Go!

HAWK (*dancing away*). Heigh-ho for Fairyland!

JAY AND ROBIN (*following*). Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho!

The KING sits as though wearied and weak.

THE FOOL (*airily*).

Lo, every father should possess

A ring his children covet;

On earth they'll love him to excess,

But more when he's above it. (*Points upwards.*)

THE KING (*groans*).

THE FOOL. Tell me, dear lord, which is thy most beloved?

THE KING. You tell me, and I'll tell you.

THE FOOL. Ye birds and bees! Hast not decided to which son to give the ring?

THE KING. Fool, I have promised the ring to each of 'em.

THE FOOL (*whistles*).

THE KING. In secret, of course, in secret, and now in secret they pester me.

THE FOOL (*removes his cap and offers it*). Take thou my fools-cap and I'll take thy crown.

THE KING. Advise me then, wise elf.

THE FOOL. My faith, sire, my advice will never make *thee* wise.

THE KING (*suspiciously*). Ho!

THE FOOL.

But I should say, let 'em e'en fight it out!

THE KING.

Fight! Fight! A fool's way out—

THE FOOL. Then, lord, give me the ring, for all men fight; only the fool laughs and is wise.

THE KING. I have a plan. Go, bid the court jeweller enter. (*The FOOL admits the JEWELLER.*) Hither, man. Hast thou done as I bade?

THE JEWELLER. Even so, sire! Here are the three rings of my fashioning, like to thy magic ring as pea to pea, save that they lack the power to make beloved.

THE KING (*examining the rings*).

A master craftsman!

Give hither the true ring; now the three thou hast made. See thou, good Fool, are they not marvelous like?

THE FOOL (*eying the KING with amazement*). Marvelous like—to cause much strife.

THE KING. Save that the true ring gloweth with the purer lustre.

THE JEWELLER (*sniggering*).

Pardon, sire, the jest. (*Points to ring which the KING holds.*)

That ring is one I fashioned; this (*Selects another.*) the true!

THE KING. The test is good, that I could not discern the ring which hath lived here on my finger. Now, sir jeweller, silence!

JEWELLER. Your majesty, for my skin's sake I would keep silence, for I fear the anger of thy sons.

THE KING. 'Tis well. Now go. (*The JEWELLER goes. To FOOL.*) My philosophers are fools, but thou a wise man! Speak, may I trust thee?

THE FOOL. To the best of my poor wits. (*Alarmed*) But I beseech thee, make not thy poor fool guardian of thy sons when thou art gone.

THE KING (*rises and takes FOOL's arm*). Come thou with me and hear my counseling. Not guardian of my sons, but of the ring! (*With horrified face the FOOL assists the KING.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II—SCENE 1—The highway to Fairyland.

The OLD BEGGAR enters leaning on a stick, assisted by his GRANDCHILD. The CHILD holds out her hand to audience.

THE CHILD (*pleadingly*).
Gentles, a penny! See, his wing is broke.
A penny, gentles!

Enter the THREE BROTHERS singing a gay song.
"There came three princes riding,
A-riding, a-riding;
There came three princes riding
With a rancy-tancy-tay!" (*Old song.*)

HAWK.
At last! There rise the towers of the faery!

JAY.
Tell me, why is the princess called "Contrary"?

ROBIN.

She loves to jest, they say. We must be wary.

THE BEGGAR. Gentles, a penny! See, my wing is broke; I may not labor.

HAWK (*gives him a blow with the stick he carries*).
A loafer on the King's highway! Begone!
Lest I do have thee gaoled for a vagrant, aye and a
masterless elf.

JAY.

Go to, brother! Here is a copper, fellow. (*Tosses him
a coin.*)

HAWK and JAY *pass out*.

ROBIN. Why art thou thus?

BEGGAR. The wars, master, the wars o' the birds and
the bees!

ROBIN.

Seek ye my father, the beloved King,
And, when I come again, I'll mend thy wing,
Or at the least, thy fortune.

BEGGAR.

Blessing, sire!
Come, my lass, wish for him his heart's desire.

The THIEF steals in.

THE CHILD (*shyly*).

I wish thee luck, sweet sir.

THIEF (*laughs hoarsely*).

Ho, ho, ho, ho!

I pray thee, lording, thy fat purse bestow.

ROBIN (*turns and regards him*).

And by what right?

THIEF (*flourishes cudgel*).

Right o' the bigger stick!

ROBIN (*mildly*).

Sayest thou so? (*Knocks THIEF down.*) Ai! Two can do that trick. (*Stands over THIEF and lifts purses from his doublet.*)

So now I filch thy purses, one, two, three.

THIEF (*admiringly*). You'd make a splendid bandit.

ROBIN. Gramercy! Get up, sirrah! (*The THIEF rises.*) Now I ask you, was it love of the gentle art of pocket-picking which prompted thee, or hunger?

THIEF (*proudly*).

Love of my art!

But, lord, at first it was need and grudging envy,
For the likes of you had all, and I had naught.

Voices of HAWK and JAY (in distance). Stop, thief!
Stop, thief! (*They run in shouting.*)

HAWK.

My purse, thou naughty knave! I'll lesson thee!

JAY.

I'll have you hanged aloft to the highest tree.

The THIEF turns upon them, snarling.

ROBIN.

Meddle not, brothers, he belongs to me.
Catch ye your purses, brothers dear, and go. (*Tosses purses.*)

HAWK. Wilt thou not have him gaoled?

ROBIN. I will not, no!

The BROTHERS shrug and go.

BEGGAR. But, lord, it is the custom—

ROBIN.

Custom—pfui!

Where there are gaols, robbers will be.

THIEF.

And when all gaols shall cease, what then?

ROBIN.

Then all men will be brethren. (*In a lighter tone*) Meet me three days hence in the elf king's palace. Farewell. (*Goes.*)

THIEF (*looking after him*). Is he a fool or wise man?

BEGGAR.

Who shall say?

He is worthy to be loved by elf and fay.

CHILD (*pulling BEGGAR's sleeve*).

Grand-dad, there goes the Princess on her way.

Music—any fairy dance. Enter the PRINCESS and her MAIDS. She stops before the BEGGAR.

PRINCESS (*points*). Whence came those lords?

BEGGAR. From Elfinland.

PRINCESS (*claps*).

The three suitors for my hand!

Tell me, sirs, of courtesy,

Tell me of these lordings three.

BEGGAR.

One of them would ha' beat me

With a cruel bit o' rope;

One of them gave me a penny,

But the last one gave me hope.

THIEF.

One o' them would ha' flogged me;

Cue would ha' hanged me high;

But the littlest 'un is the man fer me;

He give me another try.

PRINCESS (*thoughtfully*).

Come, my maids, and we will see,

Which shall be the lord for me.

Music. They dance out. The THIEF, BEGGAR and CHILD pass out the other way.

SCENE II

The court of the Princess.

Music. The MAIDS enter, form two lines and bow. Enter the PRINCESS. Horn in distance. HONEY-DEW goes out. The PRINCESS sits on the toad-stool. The MAIDS arrange her train. HONEY-DEW enters.

HONEY-DEW. Lady, the lords from Elfinland attend.

PRINCESS. We will receive them one at a time, good Honey-dew. (*HONEY-DEW goes. PRINCESS jumps up.*) Ai, a jest! Would it not be merry, maidens, to fool these noble lords?

FAIRIES (*cluster about her*). Yea, yea.

PRINCESS. Marigold, take my robe and crown and play the Princess for a space.

MARIGOLD *hastily robes herself*.

BUTTERCUP. Attend, they come.

PRINCESS (*to MARIGOLD*). Thou lookest too haughty.

MARIGOLD (*saucily*). I was aping thee.

PRINCESS (*lightly boxes her ears*). Thou minx!

HONEY-DEW. Prince Hawk of Elfinland!

HAWK *enters and bows*.

HAWK (*to MARIGOLD*). Lady, thy beauty passes the common tale.

MARIGOLD (*casts an impish look at PRINCESS*). Indeed!

HAWK. Dismiss thy maids that I may speak more freely.

MARIGOLD. Begone, ye hussies! (*All go but PRINCESS; HAWK looks at her.*) Thou mayest freely speak before her; she is my other self.

HAWK. I desired but to assure thee, lady, I am chose my father's heir; to me he hath promised the ring o' magic power. Dare I hope to gain a yet more precious treasure?

MARIGOLD (*dimpling*). Me?

HAWK. Lady, I fell slave unto thy charms at the first glimpsing.

MARIGOLD. Nay, 'tis my robe and crown.

HAWK. It is thyself.

MARIGOLD. How honeyed are thy words! Come, sir, we'll walk apart, and thou shalt woo me. (*To PRINCESS*) Take thou my robe and crown; they weigh me. (*To HAWK*) Come. (*They wander off.*)

Other MAIDS return laughing.

PRINCESS (*clutching robe*). Heigh-ho! But he was easy turned aside. There goes one suitor and the heir to the throne, and I am treated like a beggar maid.

Horn in distance.

BUTTERCUP (*grasping robe and crown*).
There comes the second Prince; let's fool him, too.

PRINCESS (*clutching robe tighter*).
My child, learn this one thing whate'er you do.
Never repeat yourself—nor sulk, nor frown. (*As BUTTERCUP sulks.*)

HONEY-DEW (*announces*). Prince Jay of Elfinland.

PRINCESS (*to BUTTERCUP*).
Hurry! My crown!
Now stand ye modestly while I am seated.
The jest would lose its flavor if repeated.

Enter JAY.

PRINCESS.
Welcome, sir Prince, unto the court of faery.

JAY.
My girl, thou art not the Princess. (*Chuckles.*) I am wary;
I'm looking for a maiden called "Contrary."
I saw you take the crown from one of these.

PRINCESS (*indignantly*). You peeked!

JAY (*to others*).

Which is the Princess? Do not tease!

HONEY-DEW.

Can you not see her breeding in her face?

JAY (*scratching his head*).

Alas, I cannot. Not a single trace!

BUTTERCUP. Choose her then by her beauty.

JAY (*falling on his knee before her*).

Thou art the fair.

Princess, wilt wed me? I'm my father's heir.

My father hath promised I shall have the ring.

ALL (*amazed*). *Thou.*

JAY.

I! Be thou my queen when I am king.

Horn in distance.

BUTTERCUP (*with a triumphant glance at the PRINCESS*). Come, we will to the garden for a spell. (*To PRINCESS*) Do thou receive the third Prince.

JAY (*grinning*). Fool him well!

BUTTERCUP, JAY *and the other MAIDS go.*

PRINCESS. Alack-a-well-a-day! Was ever a maid so treated? Told to my face I lie. (*Takes off robe and crown.*) Oh, clothes, clothes, you were deceivers ever. When the right Prince comes he will love me for myself. (*She rolls crown in robe and hurls into bushes. Then she sits dejectedly on toad-stool.*)

Enter ROBIN.

ROBIN (*imperiously*).

Up, wench, where is the Princess? (*She stares calmly at him.*)

Answer me!

PRINCESS.

La, sir, what if I told you I am she?

ROBIN.

I'd not believe.

PRINCESS (*courtesies*).

Thanks for the courtesy.

ROBIN. My lass, I would fain see the Princess without her knowing. Could'st thou manage it?

PRINCESS (*holding out her hand*). Cross my palm with silver. (*He drops coin onto her hand.*) Hide yonder. (*He hides.*) I will bring her hither. It is only fair that you should see her, for she's been observing you for five minutes exactly.

ROBIN (*comes angrily forth from his hiding place*). Bah! Where is she? I *will* not be observed.

PRINCESS (*gleefully*).

Thou canst not help it. Her eyes are on you.

Ah lord, but thou hast missed a merry jest.

Thy brothers came upon the self-same quest

As thou. But she hath fooled them. (*Takes his arm and points.*)

Yonder, see!

Each walketh with a maid of low degree.

ROBIN.

And thou wast left to fool *me*?

PRINCESS (*claps her hands*). Thou hast guessed.

ROBIN.

She is a vixen; let her stay unwed.

I will not have her; I'll take thee instead.

PRINCESS (*impishly*).

Takes two to make a quarrel, or agree.

Go, seek thy Princess.

ROBIN.

Thou'rt the maid for me!

PRINCESS (*demurely*). A serving wench?

ROBIN. My motto shall be "I SERVE."

HAWK, JAY and the MAIDS run in, half laughing, half angry.

HAWK.

Ah, lady, did we this cruel luck deserve?
Why didst thou trick us?

PRINCESS.

Lords, I would be merry.
'Tis why I'm called "The Princess Most Contrary."

ROBIN. Thou—thou—the Princess!

PRINCESS (*holds out her hand to him*).
Lords, my choice ye see,
For he chose not the Princess; he chose *me*.

Music—"There Came Three Dukes a-Riding" (Old song). ROBIN, PRINCESS and MAIDS form two lines facing each other. ROBIN and two MAIDS skip toward others on first verse; PRINCESS and MAIDS skip forward on second verse. ROBIN and PRINCESS join hands and others skip underneath and out on third verse.

There came three princes riding, a-riding, a-riding;
There came three princes riding,
With a rancy, tancy, tay!

They came to court the princess, the princess, the
princess;

They came to court the princess,
With a rancy, tancy, tay!

Oh, two of them were fooled, I guess; fooled, I guess;
fooled, I guess;

But the third one weds the princess,
With a rancy, tancy, tay!

They pass out. HAWK and JAY sit on toadstools, sulking. The KING'S PAGE runs in, he who carried the KING'S train in Act I.

PAGE.

Hasten, my lords, hasten for Elfinland,
To hear the King, your father's, last commands.
The sands of his life run short.

HAWK. We will obey. (*They start toward Elfinland. The PAGE runs the other way.*)



"SHALL WE NOT FOOL THESE NOBLE LORDS?"

JAY (*to PAGE*). Where go you, sirrah?

PAGE. For Prince Robin!

HAWK.

Stay.

He gets a bride; shall he have everything?

He gets the Princess; we will get the ring. (*Drives the protesting PAGE out before him.*)

SCENE III

The Elf King's palace or garden.

Enter the KING, supported by the FOOL and HAWK. He sits wearily.

HAWK.

Dear father, I have hasted though my wings
Were heavy as my heart.

KING (*takes ring from pouch*).

Take thou this ring.

I leave my ring as all my sires have done,

To my most obedient, most beloved son.

Thou dost desire it? Then deserve it.

HAWK (*joyfully*). Yea, I will deserve it.

KING. Bid thy brother come. (*Exit HAWK; enter JAY.*)

JAY. Father, I weep to see thee.

KING (*monotonously*).

Take the ring.

I leave my ring as all my sires have done,

To my most obedient, most beloved son.

Thou dost desire it? Then deserve it.

JAY. Ah! Even as thou promised. (*Holds ring up to light.*)

KING.

What is that I hear?

Where is my least son? What is that they sing?

JAY.

He hath got him a princess, but I have the ring. (*He goes.*)

Wedding song in distance. Enter ROBIN with the PRINCESS and her MAIDS. They stop short. The PRINCESS waves the MAIDS out.

KING.

Come hither, my dear son, my last and least,
And thou, his bride. (*They kneel before him.*)
Why didst thou choose my Robin?

PRINCESS.

Dear lord, I know not, save, perchance, like thee,
He makes himself beloved by God and man.

KING.

Is it so? Is it so? Robin, take thou this ring.
I leave my ring as all my sires have done,
To my most obedient, most beloved son.
Thou dost desire it? Then deserve it.

The FOOL goes out.

ROBIN. I vow I will not fail thee.

THE KING.

Hide the ring for now. (*Enter the FOOL with HAWK and JAY. They also kneel.*)

Hear ye my last commands, my sonnës three:
Live ye in peace; live ye in unity.
Hear ye my words, for 'tis my passing hour:
Strive not over the Ring of Magic Power! (*He goes out feebly assisted by his SONS. The FOOL remains alone.*)

THE FOOL (*holding a ring aloft*).

I hold the true ring.
He shall be lord o' the land
Who best obeys his father's last command.

ACT III.



The King's gardens.

Enter the PAGE. Enter ATTENDANTS bearing litter on which rests the body of the KING, screened by curtains, followed by his SONS, his WISE MEN, JEWELLER, FOOL, the PRINCESS and her MAIDS, the BEGGAR and his GRANDCHILD, and the THIEF.

Song—Chopin's Funeral March.

Gracious and gentle was our king.
 Beloved by virtue of the ring.
 Now let both man and maid his praises sing,
 Great king of ours!
 Ave atque vale!

The ATTENDANTS rest the litter in center. HAWK strides forward.

HAWK.

Hearken, my people.
 Lo, in my father's presence, hear my oath
 To rule with wisdom—justice—

JAY (*laughs*). Thou! Thou rule!

HAWK (solemnly).

I rule through the might o' the ring. (*Holds ring aloft.*)

JAY (*screams*).

The ring is mine!

Dying, my father blessed me as he gave.

And I will rule with mercy. Mine the ring! (*Holds up his ring.*)

HAWK.

Thou envious fool! 'Tis a base counterfeit!

JAY.

Thou base knave!

ROBIN.

End ye this unseemly broil.

I cry ye halt, through the virtue of my ring. (*Holds it to view.*)

HAWK.

Bring hither your rings. (*They do so.*)

I pray you, wise men, see!

WISE MEN (*examine rings*).

They are as like, as like as pea to pea.

JAY AND HAWK.

They are not like.

ROBIN.

I will maintain my right
Against the world.

THE PAGE (*gleefully*).

A fight! A fight! A fight!

The three BROTHERS throw off cloaks and arm themselves.

PRINCESS (*goes to ROBIN*).

What matter the ring? Hast thou so soon forgot
Thy father's words—

ROBIN (*sternly*).

He sowed the seeds of strife.

I will defend my kingship with my life.

The PEOPLE form a circle. HAWK aims at ROBIN. They may either fight with swords or wrestle. HAWK is disabled.

ROBIN. Yield thee.

HAWK.

I yield. (*He gets up ruefully.*) But this is not the end. My foot, it slipped.

ROBIN (*to JAY*). Defend thyself. Defend. (*ROBIN and JAY fight until JAY is disarmed.*)

PEOPLE. Huzza! Huzza! For the King! For the King! For the King!

ROBIN. Yield thee!

JAY. I yield my right unto the ring.

FIRST WISE MAN.

My son, the voice of the rabble hail thee, "Lord."
Now listen to thy wise men.

ROBIN.

Tell me, sirs,
Have I made good my right unto the throne?
I have fought and won in the tourney in fair fight.
Speak, have I proved the ring is mine of right?

WISE MAN.

My son, the issue of the fight is in God's hands.
Thou hast not proven; God hath chose.

WISE MAN.

My son, since time began, the issue of the fight, it is
deemed sacred and final.
He who abides not by its issue, the same is recreant and
coward.

WISE MAN.

My son, thy might hath proved the virtue of thy ring.
(*Crowns ROBIN.*)

PEOPLE. Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!

PRINCESS (*advances*).

Wise men, ye call yourselves?

Ye say, because that *he* hath worsted them,

That he hath proved his lordship, he hath proved

His is the rightful ring.

I say,

He hath proved nothing, O philosophers,

Save that his arm was stronger in the fight,

Save that his sight was keener, his blade more true.

To ROBIN.

The ring is thine only by virtue of obedience

Unto thy sire's command. And if thou still

Would be his most obedient son, yield up

Thy claim.

ROBIN (*approaches litter and opens curtain*).

But, dear my father,

'Twas thy hand gave the ring to me, as sign

I was thy most beloved son—

HAWK.

That sign,

He gave to me.

JAY.

To me, to me, he gave it.

PRINCESS.

And that son

Who loves his father most, will yield his ring. (*A pause.*

She kneels by litter.)

Dear lord, thy test hath failed.

The ring which in thy life made thee beloved,

Hath made thee now despised.

ROBIN.

Not so, my father!

I understand thee now. This was the test.

I yet will yield obedience.

Dear my father,

The ring thou gavest, take it, false or true. (*Drops ring on litter.*)

To HAWK and JAY.

Decide among yourselves the lordship.

HAWK and JAY draw apart and glower at one another.

PAGE (*gleefully*).

A fight! Hurray! A fight! A fight! A FIGHT!

The FOOL darts between them.

FOOL.

Hearken, ye wise folk, to a witless fool,
Ye have forgot the virtue of the ring:
Not that it made him *king*, but that it made
That person most *beloved* by God and man
Who wore it.

Is not this the final test?

Speak, O philosophers.

WISE MAN.

Yea, can a fool speak wisdom?

WISE MAN.

Yet it smacks of reason.

WISE MAN.

Ye three brothers, speak,
Which one of you is most beloved by all? (*Silence.*)
Speak, for he is the owner of the ring.
He is the rightful heir. (*Silence. The WISE MEN lift
eyes to heaven.*)

Alas, your rings

Are all three false. The rightful ring is lost.

The BEGGAR steps forward.

BEGGAR.

Listen, gentles, list, I pray,
I was a beggar on the King's highway.
The first prince would ha' beat me
With a cruel bit o' rope;
The second prince gave me a penny,
But the last prince gave me hope.

The THIEF strides forward.

THIEF.

Listen, you all, hear my say,
I was a bandit on the King's highway.
One guy would ha' flogged me;
One would ha' hanged me high,
But the littlest 'un is the man fer me;
He give me another try.

THE BEGGAR'S GRANDCHILD (*runs to WISE MEN*).

O sirs, he mended my grand-dad's wing.
For that I love him, make him king.

WISE MAN (*smiles*). Ye people all, speak, who is
the most beloved?

PEOPLE. Robin, our king!

WISE MAN.

Bear ye the old king forth; (*ATTENDANTS remove KING
to music of funeral march.*)

Cry for the new.

King, not by virtue of the magic ring,
Neither by strength of arm,
But that he is beloved by God and man.

PEOPLE. Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!

Wedding song and dance.

Praises we sing; garlands we bring;
He shall be lord through the power of the ring:
She shall be queen; fairer ne'er seen,
Hark to the wedding bells, "Ting, a-ling ling."

ROBIN *offers his hand to PRINCESS, but she signs to him to choose one of her maids. She goes to HAWK and JAY and insists upon their joining in the dance with her. They dance out singing.*

When all have gone but the FOOL, he springs lightly on toad-stool, or onto rim of the pool, if there be one. He draws the Ring o' Magic Power from his bosom and holds it forth.

FOOL.

Thou ring—the genuine—
Ring, if I, obedient to my master's last commands,

Gave thee to him who best obeyed the King,
Ring, could I make him more beloved by all,
Give him a better claim to kingship?

No!

Methinks the time of kings is passed and o'er,
Save by love's suffrage.

The magic power
Never was in the ring, but in the mind
Of man. Thou art as innocent of power
As any idle tale. Nor will I stir
Men's minds anew to strife by the bestowal
Of thee.

Go, little ring,

The magic power is in the loving heart. (*He tosses the
ring into pool, or throws it toward audience, and
skips away.*)



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